

The 2015 Paris Attacks: A Turning Point for French Citizens of Maghribi Descent?

Undergraduate Honors Research Thesis

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## The Day of Baptism

On November 13, 2015, Paris experienced one of the most grave and deadly terrorist attacks in its history: three groups of three men affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) carried out a series of coordinated attacks at six sites around Paris—including the Bataclan concert hall and the *Stade de France* soccer stadium—, leaving 130 people dead and hundreds wounded. Two days later, on November 15, Magyd Cherfi graced the French daily *Libération* with words he strung together in an attempt to decipher his thoughts and emotions on the day he called his baptism (Cherfi, Carnage, *Libération*).

There are days where we love France, where we feel like singing the *Marseillaise* (French national anthem), feel like being tricolor like an unwavering supporter. There are days where we don't reproach ourselves for not being French enough... This is a disaster and is the day of my baptism, I become solemnly French.<sup>1</sup>

This love letter to France, titled "Carnage", shocked readers who were familiar with Cherfi. The 55-year-old activist singer and writer, born and raised in Toulouse, France by Algerian immigrants from the region of Kabylie, had previously focused his work on critiquing France. Along with his brother and childhood friends, Cherfi founded the French rock music group Zebda, which throws playful lyrical jabs at the major issues of racism and discrimination in France. Now, he was publicly displaying his affection for the country he had critiqued for so long. Suddenly, Cherfi has become French.

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<sup>1</sup> All French text and interviews translated by Massarah Mikati.

# Carnages

Par Magyd Cherfi, Zebda — 15 novembre 2015 à 13:40



Devant le Carillon à Paris, les hommages spontanés.  
Edouard Caupeil pour Libération



Magyd Cherfi, du groupe Zebda, ne s'est jamais senti si Français, avec comme une tendresse pour certains de ses compatriotes si maladroits et si imparfaits.

➔ «Je deviens solennellement français», par Magyd Cherfi

Il y a des jours comme ça où on aime la France, où on a envie de chanter la Marseillaise, envie d'être tricolore comme un supporter insupportable. Il y a des jours où on se reproche de pas être assez français. Des jours où on voudrait s'appeler Dupont quand on s'appelle Magyd. Suis-je toqué ? Suis-je choqué ? Oui je laisse se répandre la douleur en mon cœur et reposer ma tête percutée de plein fouet.

C'était un carnage et c'est mon jour de baptême, je deviens solennellement français, c'est dit. Je promets devant le fronton des mairies d'aimer la France pour le pire et le meilleur, de la protéger, de la chérir jusqu'au

N.a.. Screen grab of "Carnage". 2015. [liberation.fr](http://liberation.fr).  
Web. 10 April, 2017.

Whereas the U.S. is an extremely diverse, multicultural and pluralistic country filled with multiple ethnic communities that each constitute an essential stitch in the fabric of America and the American identity, France exhibits only two of the three traits the U.S. has: it is diverse, it is multicultural, but it is by no means pluralistic. France excludes pluralism purposely, concealing the diversity of its non-white citizens in an attempt to preserve its revered social model of universalism. Citizens are expected and required to conform to a "neutral" identity in the public

sphere—in adherence to what many French informally call the "social contract"—, where hyphenated and individualistic identities are foreign and unacceptable concepts.

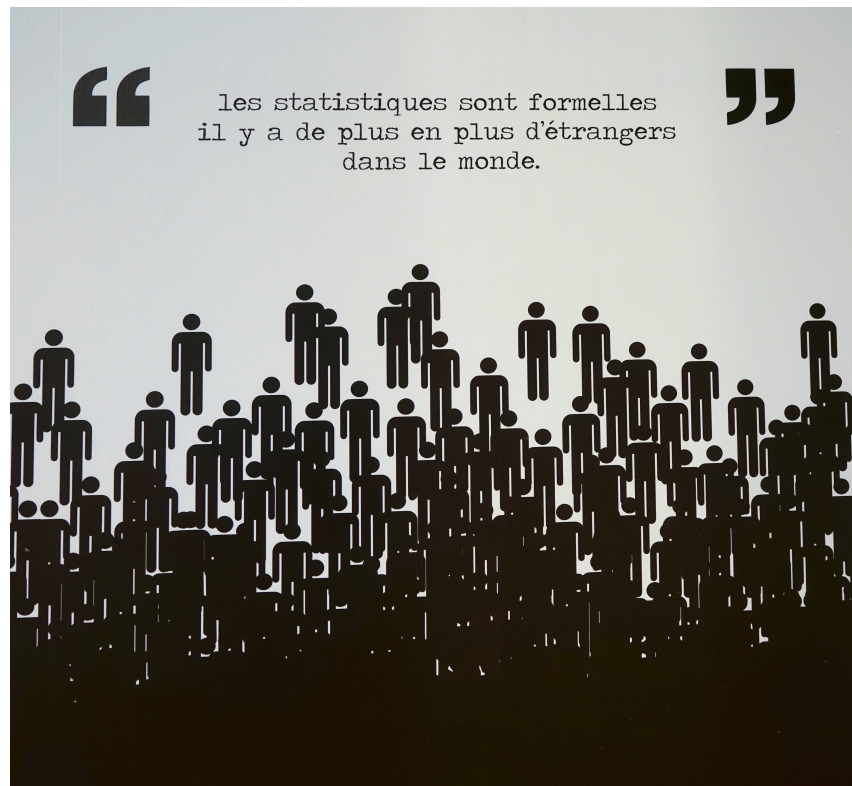
*"This is a disaster and is the day of my baptism, I become solely French."*

This social contract particularly—and often solely, it seems—holds true to the Maghribi community in France, which has been facing racism since the beginning of the 20th century in the name of universalism and *laïcité* (a version of secularism). The complex French-Maghribi relationship can be simplistically categorized into two time periods: colonialism and post-colonialism. France was heavily invested in its colonial endeavors in North Africa, notably Algeria. The imperialist country convinced itself that it was gifting these populations with culture, civilization and modernity, when in reality it was exploiting and stripping them of their own cultures and identities. Fed up with the domination, these countries fought for their independence—Algeria for a bloody seven years—, and France holds on to the bitterness of the breakup to this day.

The end of colonialism, however, was not the end of France's interaction with Maghribis. In the 1950s and '60s, France brought in waves of Maghribi immigrants to help stimulate a stunted economy by rebuilding and redeveloping the country after World War 2. Though these immigrants were originally treated as temporary and kept at a physical and social distance at the periphery of Paris and other big cities, these immigrants eventually made themselves at home and started families. Now France had a new problem: the immigrants' children.

The French State was able to dominate over the immigrants populations because they were not French citizens, but how could it keep up this relationship of the dominant and dominated with a generation that brings back the painful memories of colonialism while holding the power of citizenship? The answer was to avoid acknowledging their presence, their social reality in French society. Evidently, discrimination subsequently ensued. Today, third and fourth generation citizens of North African descent are still called “immigrants” and face disproportionate, discriminatory obstacles in finding employment when they possess Muslim names (Silberman and Fournier, 2007). In addition, 70% of prisoners in French jails are Muslims (Shatz, 2015). A storm of statements and claims from politicians, public figures, and general citizens exhibit the common belief that French-Maghribis do not wish to integrate in France (this helps to ensure they not be accepted as French). However, a plethora of research has been released in the past few decades that have debunked these claims. Second and third generation immigrants *have* in fact assimilated to mainstream cultural norms in France — it is the social and economic policies in France that have failed to integrate ethnic French (Hargreaves, 2005).

France couldn't hide from reality forever, though, which was ultimately proven on November 13, 2015. These attacks shuffled the playing deck, and white France fumbled with its cards as its social model began to crumble around it. I first started to realize this after reading Cherfi's letter, which struck me as it did many others. I had already been so interested in French identity, and now there was a monumental moment in French history that could very well also be pivotal.



Massarah Mikati. *"The statistics are official there are more and more foreigners in the world."* 2016. Graphic by Ali Guessom of the association Remem'beur. *Origines Contrôlées*. Toulouse.

For my research, I decided to examine how the November 13 terrorist attacks impacted the lives and identities of French citizens of Maghribi descent. Initially, upon reading Cherfi's letter in *Libération*, I hypothesized that the terrorist attacks were an event that unified French society and made these citizens' patriotism surface, as they seemed to have done with Cherfi. I was convinced that, like me, members of the French-Maghribi community frequently had identity crises and didn't know where they belonged — thus, the attacks must have clarified the answers to their questions.

I spent four months in France to put this hypothesis to test by staying up-to-date with the most popular topics, debates and frames of issues relating to the attacks and the French-Maghribi and Muslim communities in the mainstream media; attending political, social activist and

academic conferences and seminars on related topics; and interviewing 35 French citizens, including but not limited to scholars and academics, novelists, journalists, musicians, government employees, religious figures and students. In discussing my thesis topic with my interviewees, I questioned and challenged their (and my own) notions of and perspectives on the fundamental elements of French society and its Republican values, French national and cultural identity, the place of French-Maghribis in these definitions and the impact of colonial memories thereof, and the shift—if any—after the terrorist attacks.

*"The attacks ignited a crisis over what it means to be French, the place of the French-Maghribi community in this definition, and the problematic notion and façade of universalism."*

What I found was much more complex and nuanced than I had naïvely anticipated. Very few French citizens of Maghribi descent shared the same opinions beyond the initial grief they felt for their country in the aftermath of the attacks — even members of the same family. However, despite the differing reactions and responses to the attacks, there are two main conclusions I was able to draw from my interviews. Firstly, I found that the attacks brought to light the problematic claims that the universalism France's government practices results in equality. The consequences of this social model climaxed on November 13, 2015, when France's attackers were not foreigners like those of America's 9/11, but were French-born and raised. Secondly, whereas I had previously assumed an identity crisis was taking place within the French-Maghribi community while the white French community remained confident about its identity, I discovered the contrary. It is the white French community that has been undergoing an



identity crisis that has only heightened since the attacks. Much of the French-Maghribi community, in the meantime, has consistently been confident about where it belongs: France. As such, the attacks ignited a crisis over what it means to be French, the place of the French-Maghribi community in this definition, and the problematic notion and facade of universalism.

In order to fully understand the complete picture and complexities thereof of the impacts and responses to the terrorist attacks, I will be constructing the argument of my thesis around three main themes I drew from three interviews that struck me the most: Magyd Cherfi, Yasser Louati and Nawelle Mohammed. The subjects of each of these interviews have rather different backgrounds, beliefs and affiliations—as well as different ages—that inform and influence their responses to the attacks. Their ages in particular show an interesting trend in the shift of identification throughout the generations of Maghribi descent: the further down you go in age, the stronger you see the acceptance of creating a *mélange* of their cultures and their religions. Though they, and the rest of my interviewees, are by no means a representation of the French-Maghribi community and its generations—as is evident by the diversity among the responses themselves—, they are a few windows that peer into the complexities of the French-Maghribi relationship post-November 13.

The first chapter of this thesis, "Magyd: Discovering French Nationalism", will discuss two major dichotomies of French nationalism. The first is the seemingly idealistic image that is French identity, yet the major flaws that can be found within it when looked at more closely. The second is the phenomenon of the rise of patriotism in the aftermath of terrorist attacks, yet the divisive controversy surrounding this phenomenon when it takes place within stigmatized communities, in which case it tends to be seen as an unnecessary overcompensation. I will

highlight these dichotomies by analyzing "Carnage" and Cherfi's new book *My Gaulois Side* (which is the term used to describe French ancestors), the reactions to his work within both the Maghribi and white communities, and Cherfi's own contradictory discussions of his work. At the same time that many Maghribis felt betrayed by Cherfi's published work and started viewing him as an Uncle Tom of sorts, there were also many white French who were skeptical of Cherfi's patriotic declaration.

Whereas the first chapter will be more focused on Maghribis in general, the second chapter, "Yasser: Attacked Post-Attacks", will take a closer look into the Muslim communities of France. Here, I will critique the purpose and efficacy of *laïcité*, and show how the claims to defend this French Republican value have been twisted to target Muslim communities and exclude them from the French Republic, particularly after the November 13 attacks. After the attacks, Louati, who is an anti-Islamophobia activist, did not have time to grieve for his country before he had to start defending his Muslim community from both verbal and physical attacks. After the attacks, the state issued a State of Emergency, which has raised concern amongst human rights groups such as Amnesty International for its disproportionate targeting of Muslim and Maghribi communities. Thus, this chapter will be focusing on the doubled consequences of the attacks the Muslim community has to endure.

From proactive Magyd, to defensive Yasser, we now arrive at unapologetically annoyed Nawelle Mohammed in "Nawelle: A French Islam?" The daughter of a white French mother and immigrant Moroccan father, Mohammed—who wears the hijab—identifies 100% as both French and Muslim, and rarely ever as Arab. After the attacks, Mohammed felt ostracized by an article that circulated within social media claiming the attacks' targets—drinking, dancing and partying

—were emblematic of France’s spirit. But to Mohammed, this isn’t France. In this chapter, I will address the most pressing question in French public discourse today: Is Islam compatible with the values of the French Republic? Mohammed has no reason to doubt otherwise.

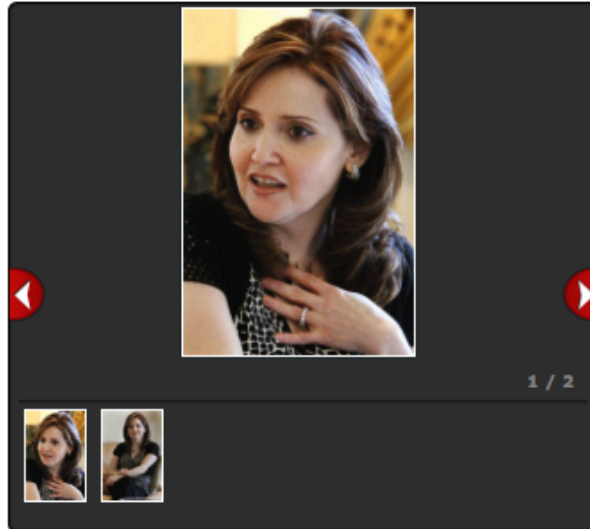
The topic of my thesis is of particular interest and importance to me as a first-generation Lebanese-American Muslim. My parents immigrated to a small town in Northeast Ohio from the coastal city of Tripoli, Lebanon in 1986, seeking refuge from a bloody civil war. Although we were thousands of miles away from their home country, my parents made sure to raise my brothers and me as if we had never left — especially after the 9/11 attacks. I remember my mom bringing goodie bags to my elementary school classes on our Islamic holidays, satisfying kids’ sweet teeth while giving them presentations about Islam. When she wasn’t educating kids, she was educating the adults in the community with free workshops to dispel misconceptions about Islam and the Arab world. My brothers were just as heavily involved and influential on me as my mom, doing everything from assuming leadership roles in Arab student organizations in university, to wittily including their Lebanese heritage in their AOL screen names. I, in the meantime, did everything I could to be just like them — though I didn’t always know what I was doing. Every first day of school, my fun fact about myself was that I was Lebanese and Muslim. I used to choreograph and perform dances to Arabic music with the other kids in my neighborhood for school functions. During the Microsoft PowerPoint segment of our 6th grade computer class, I proudly enlightened my classmates with a presentation on Lebanon. And I have a very distinct memory of confidently telling my childhood friend’s mother (who was Republican) that former President Bush only invaded Iraq for oil — I was 9 years old at the time.

## Arab-American tries to correct misconceptions about Islam

By Cheryl Powell  
Beacon Journal staff writer

0 Comments

Published: September 11, 2011 - 07:09 AM



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"It was devastating," she recalled.

Growing up in Lebanon, Fetna Mikati knew the horrors of war and senseless acts of violence.

Before she and her husband, Fadel, moved to America and settled in Kent, their son, then 2 years old, became so accustomed to the sounds of bombs that he started dancing to the explosions.

"I have vivid memories of bombs and killings and trying to run away," she said.

So when the attacks on America happened the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, Mikati felt the pain and loss of the victims and their families on a

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### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Quiz: Jews around the world are celebrating which Jewish holiday this week?

- ☐ Passover
- ☐ Channukah
- ☐ Yom Kippur
- ☐ No idea

NEXT

### MOST POPULAR

24 HRS 7 DAYS

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Uber driver accused of sexually assaulting passenger in Akron, latest in national trend

Cleveland Clinic CEO: 'We

N.a.. Screen grab of an article published about Fetna Mikati's activism. 2011. [ohio.com](http://ohio.com). Web. 10 April, 2017.

*"I never once questioned if I belonged in America, or rather, if America belonged to me."*

Needless to say, my family succeeded in making me proud of who I was and where I came from. But it wasn't all sunshine and rainbows. Constantly identifying with my origins while living in a predominantly white culture with predominantly white friends was no easy feat,

especially in the post-9/11 world. I was still subject to frequent discrimination by peers and strangers, identity crises often arose—particularly during my adolescent years—, and it really wasn't until university that I found myself and my place amongst other individuals who, like me, were caught between two or more cultures. Despite the discrimination I witnessed and experienced, and the push and pull between my two cultures, though, I never once questioned if I belonged in America, or rather, if America belonged to me. I eventually was able to integrate my Arab, American and Muslim identities into one — what the French call "creolization". It is this mix of cultures and identities that makes me, and many others like me, truly American; an Americanness that is beautifully captured in Shepard Fairey's series of posters titled "We the People" (pictured below). We pride ourselves on our hyphenated identities, and contribute to the richness of the American identity and culture with our roots.

This phenomenon of Americans being able to proudly and strongly identify as American while still holding onto their roots caught French journalist Bernard-Henri Lévy off guard when he retraced Alexis de Tocqueville's 1831 journey through America in 2005 in order to reexamine his findings published in his book *Democracy in America*. When he passed through Detroit, Michigan, he was shocked by how American citizens of Arab descent felt, in comparison to how little ethnic French actually feel French:

How can one in post-9/11 America remain loyal to one's Muslim faith and not be taken for a bad citizen? For the inhabitants of Dearborn, Michigan, a few miles west of Detroit, the question doesn't even arise. This town is a little special, of course. Its McDonald's, for instance, is halal. A supermarket is called Al Jazeera. There are mosques. The question of twofold allegiance that is poisoning the debate in France about where one belongs does not arise here. We are even farther from those French suburbs where they spit on the flag and hiss at the national anthem... My great American lesson. A fine lesson of democracy at work — that is, of

integration and compromise... Despite Iraq, despite Bush, despite the hawks of the so-called clash of civilizations.

Upon taking a class on North African literature during my second year of college, I quickly came to the same realization as Lévy, from the other end. By studying and analyzing everything from short stories and novels written by French citizens of Maghribi descent such as Driss Charibi's *Le Passé Simple (The Simple Past)*, to films like *The Class* and *Skirt Day*, which peered into *l'école républicaine*, to the protest music of artists like Zebda, I realized that my ability to adopt a hyphenated identity was not at all the case for ethnic minorities in France — especially the Maghribi community. Either they were French, or they were not. I was in utter shock — this was a concept incredibly hard for me to grasp as an American. My research in France ended up becoming a reverse-Alexis de Tocqueville journey for me. While my Americanness and appreciation for the United States' inclusiveness fueled my passion for French identity, my experience in France made me realize how much better America was than I had previously perceived, and how lucky I was to have grown up in the United States as the daughter of Lebanese immigrants.

*"My great American lesson. A fine lesson of democracy at work — that is, of integration and compromise."*

There are multiple objectives I hope to accomplish with my thesis, especially in light of the global political climate we are witnessing today of the delicate showdown between terrorism and democracy. My research is applicable to broader issues faced by democratic countries worldwide, and is of particular interest to Americans with the commencement of a new Trump presidency and a heightened public discourse regarding Islam and multiculturalism. By

examining the issues that plague French society, this research speaks to what it means to be a pluralistic democracy, questions how integration contributes to a well-functioning democracy, and analyzes the destiny of countries where hyphenated identities are a taboo.



Fairey, Shepard. *We the People*. Digital image. *CNN*. N.p., 19 Jan. 2017. Web. 10 Apr. 2017.

### **Magyd: Discovering French Nationalism**

Two days after the November 13, 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, Magyd Cherfi stunned readers with "Carnage", what he calls a love letter he wrote to France. About a year later, he further shook pop culture and sparked debate and controversy with his third published book, *My Gaulois Side*, which is a romanticized account of the year he passed the Baccalaureate (the entrance exam for university in France) — the first Maghribi from his poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Toulouse to accomplish this feat, or so he says. Both "Carnage" and *My Gaulois Side* are strong declarations of Cherfi's Frenchness and loyalty to France. However, while these pieces were popular and admired by some, they were seen as a betrayal and overcompensation by others, transforming Cherfi into an Uncle Tom in the eyes of many. Cherfi's post-November 13 writings are akin to a thorny rose: beautiful from the distance, yet painfully prickly when examined more closely. These pieces exhibit two major dichotomies of nationalism, particularly in France. First, by painting every detail of the mainstream vision of French identity, Cherfi's writings are eloquent testimonies to the image the French pride themselves on. However, his excessive and overbearing manner in depicting this image transforms his writing into a biting subtle emphasis on the fundamental flaws of this image, its concept, and the way in which it is preserved. Second, Cherfi's writings portray the dichotomy of patriotism: the phenomenon of its rise in the aftermath of terrorist attacks, yet the risk of ingenuity and loss of self when overdone.

#### **French Identity: A Thorny Rose**

"Carnage" is a masterpiece of a text that eloquently transmits two messages to its readers, the first of which is Cherfi's portrayal of an idealistic and romanticized French identity.

Throughout the text, Cherfi carefully and skillfully interweaves a mélange of both staple cultural



and national Republican values. In each paragraph of his letter, Cherfi throws in at least one symbol of the Republic and its values: the *Marseillaise*, the town hall pediments, the flag, *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, the bipartisan politics, *laïcité*, and, finally, the tomb of the unknown soldier. He pairs these with the staples of French culture: cheese, George Brassens, crêpes, Michel Houellebecq and Easter. "There are days where we want to buy two Christmas trees, one for tradition, the other for the effort to embody this country that tries to make a place for us in three words." In pairing these two elements of Republicanism and culture, Cherfi captures the true essence of the idealistic French identity.

In his recently published book *Dire la France*, Vincent Martigny, a research associate with the Center of Political Research at the Sciences Po Institute in Paris, breaks down the elements of what we talk about when we talk about France. According to Martigny, the concept of French national identity was not invented by the political Right, as is widely believed, but in fact was planted in political discourse by the Left—specifically, the Socialist Party—in the 1980s. Through his research, he found that French national identity is very much rooted in cultural identity, which he defines as comprising three principle forms and one supplemental one: the fine arts; the French lifestyle, including gastronomy and language; Frenchness, which is embodied by a world vision molded by the other aspects of French culture; and, finally, the supplemental and complementary form is that of Republicanism.

*"If we need to promote equality, we need a certain common culture to do so, and so we need foreigners to integrate into the culture."*

John Richard Bowen explains that the Republican way of thinking requires a society to agree on basic values, and that "French Republicans seek to rigorously and consistently justify politics according to this idea" (Bowen 12). Essentially, the French political philosophy prioritizes general interests and shared values over individual interests and pluralism (Bowen), much like that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. One of the essential, core values of this Republicanism is the idea that everyone is equal — no single individual is better than another, nor will s/he receive better treatment than another (whether this is the actual reality is another story). As such, placing together French cultural identity and Republicanism to define French national identity is a dangerous combination, as it roots national identity in a singular, one-dimensional cultural identity that is expected to be universally adopted. Thus, France nurtures a fear of difference and the subsequent marginalization of its diverse populations. "The problem with difference in France is fostered by the fact that in the Republican system, we equate equality and 'identity'," Martigny explained to me. "The fact that to be equal means in some way we need to be identical. If we need to promote equality, we need a certain common culture to do so, and so we need foreigners to integrate into the culture."

It is at this point that we begin to feel the prickly thorns of the rose, as it is into a white culture that foreigners are expected to integrate while abandoning their own in the name of universalism, neutrality and anti-communitarianism. Balla Fofana, a journalist at *Libération* and the son of Malian immigrants, pointed out this hypocrisy in French Republican values to me in a hip, train station-converted-café in a gentrified *arrondissement* on the outskirts of Paris. "The French standard is to believe that universalism is strictly *white* and *male*," he said to me as young

Parisian hipsters and professionals walked in and out of the cafe. Out of over 200 journalists who work at *Libération*, Fofana says he is the only black journalist.

I could say that they're white communarians. They don't see it, but when you see administrative council meetings for large businesses, and there's only white males, well this is not communitarianism to them because in their minds they incarnate neutrality.

Cherfi depicts this dominance and status quo of white culture in "Carnage", saying, for instance, there are "days where we want our names to be Dupont when our name is Magyd." Or, more strikingly, "Days when even black or even Muslim, we wish our ancestors were *Gaulois*." The characteristics of Frenchness that Cherfi strings together throughout his love letter, from white names to Easter, are emblematic of the expectation of being white and Catholic in order to be considered "pure French" — a term that I often heard people use during my time in France. As Cherfi says, "Being French isn't enough — you have to become it."



Massarah Mikati. "Being French requires proving it every day." 2016. Graphics by Ali Guessom of the association Remem'beur. *Origines Contrôlées*. Toulouse.

And so, Cherfi ends "Carnage" with the line, "Some days, but there are others," emphasizing the conditionality and exception of this tender admiration. Conditional and an exception these affections were, as a little over 2 months after he published "Carnage" Cherfi wrote "My Apologies to France", another open letter to his country — yet this one is far from the declaration of love he had previously written:

Sorry for exasperating you, for living amongst ourselves, for interfering with your identity, oh, sorry for not being Christian... Madame, stay the same, eternally! Sorry for taking apart your ancient pedestal, for the Empire we unfastened, for the disorder on every street corner, for loving our mothers who will never be neither Jeanne, nor Marianne, sorry for helping our fathers grieve over all the deaths of those who were your enemies, for belonging to two factions. We will eat crêpes at Mardi Gras, chocolate at Easter and Jesus will be planted in front of the Christmas tree.

With "My Apologies to France", Cherfi uses many of the same examples he had in "Carnage" as traits he some days desired and wished he exhibited. Now, we have reached those "other" days where he regards those same traits with contempt and resentment. By using the same traits in both letters, Cherfi puts a magnifying glass up against the dichotomies, the thorns of the rose that is French identity, showing the white French community that what may be a beautiful image for them is an unfair, unattainable and exclusive box for others. "The Maghribi identity crisis exists because of a lack of recognition," Fofana said. "We don't accept you entirely, and we force you to make a schizophrenic choice: Be French, but you'll never be totally French — either you're too French, or you're not French enough." But why the need for this box in the first place? According to Tayeb Cherfi, in order to understand this box and the French Republican values of equality and "identity", as Martigny says, you must first understand French history.

*"We don't accept you entirely, and we force you to make a schizophrenic choice: Be French, but you'll never be totally French."*

### **French History: A Lens into Today's France**

Tayeb Cherfi is Magyd's quick-witted, kind-hearted older brother. He seems to know everyone, always stopping to give a warm hello to those who cross his path as he passionately completes the items on his to-do list. I met Tayeb at a festival he had organized through Tactikollectif, a political and social activist group based in Toulouse that he co-founded along with other members of Zebda. The annual festival, titled "Controlled Origins", hosts writers, activists and musicians to discuss different topics of multiculturalism, diversity and citizenship in France.

I tagged along with Tayeb on his to-do list during the first weekend of the festival to get his thoughts on my thesis. We bumped along the tight roads of southern France in an uncomfortably oversized, white cargo van to pick up a grill for a barbecue, with a tank of gas rolling around in the back which he joked would look suspicious considering our Middle Eastern descent. Cherfi told me you have to understand the history of France, starting with when "they cut off (Louis XVI's) head," he eloquently described to me. "That's what created centralized France, because the Girondins lost against the Jacobins, so then they needed one France."

Essentially, since the French Revolution, France has been fighting to preserve the nation by eliminating identities that differed from the Parisian one, around which they chose to centralize their national identity. The first threat to this identity was the different regions of France, which the state took care of by obligating their inhabitants to extinguish their respective



Massarah Mikati. Cie Difé Kako dance team performs a rendition of WWI in France at the *Origines Contrôlées* festival in Toulouse, France. 15 October 2016.

French dialects and cultures, and instead speak the Parisian dialect and aspire to emulate the Parisian culture. Eventually, at the turn of the 19th century, the new threat became the Jews, which resulted in a major rise in antisemitism. And now, it is the Maghribis — particularly the Algerians. The supplemental complexities with Algeria are due to the colonial history, during which Algeria was not France's protectorate, like Morocco and Tunisia, but a settler colony — thus, a department, an extension of France. France enforced this mentality in every aspect of Algerian life, beginning with childhood, which was depicted in Algerian author Mohammed Dib's *La Grande Maison* (*The Large House*). The novel follows the story of young Omar in colonial Algeria, and the fourth chapter recounts a critical lesson his teacher, Monsieur Hassan, gives the class:

"Who here knows what *Patrie* (motherland) means?"

"France is our motherland," Brahim recited.

France, with the capital of Paris. (Omar) knew this. The French who they caught glimpses of in the city came from this country. To go there or come back, you must traverse the sea, take the boat... The sea: the Mediterranean sea. Never seen the sea, or a boat... France, an image of multiple colors. How was this country, so far away, his mother? His mother was at home, she is Aïni... Aïni isn't France. Nothing in common. Omar had discovered a lie. Motherland or not motherland, France was not his mother (Dib 20-21).

Since their youth, these children were being taught and trained to develop a loyalty and love for this faraway land with which they had no real connection. Despite Algeria supposedly being an extension of France, however, Algerians continuously remained second-class citizens, dominated and exploited by the French. For instance, electorally, it took nine Algerian votes to equate one French vote. The colonial strategy of "civilizing" the indigenous people, but not too much, was done purposely in order to maintain the status of dominant and dominated, a common theme throughout French history. This concept is vividly portrayed in *The Simple Past*, a post-colonial novel written by renowned Moroccan novelist Driss Chraïbi. *The Simple Past* follows the story of a young Moroccan boy who attends the French school system in colonized Morocco, and subsequently loses himself between the French and Moroccan cultures. In the final essay he writes to pass his Baccalaureate exam, Chraïbi portrays the French point-of-view on colonialism: "We, the French, are in the midst of civilizing you, the Arabs. Sadly, in bad faith and with no pleasure. Because, if by chance you end up becoming our equals, I ask you: in relation to whom and to what will we be civilized, *us*?" (Charïbi 208).





Massarah Mikati. *"To our mothers, these heroes..."* 2016. Toulouse.

Thus, one by one, the colonies demanded and fought for their independence — Algeria for a bloody seven years, the bitter memories of which still live on in the French nation.

Martigny likens the relationship between the French and the Algerians to a passionate love story:

It's a bit like a couple where you're very much in love with somebody, and she turns you down after a horrible fight. So one of the two leaves, and the person left behind just doesn't accept it after years and years. And at the same time, this person that left you is coming to your house all the time. But it wasn't really love — it was pride, because Algeria was a trophy wife. So there's this idea that Algeria kicked us out of their country, and now they're trying to invade us.

While Algeria was meant to be a second France during the colonial era, it has been made clear that France will never be Algeria. And so we find ourselves in present day, where the children of the colonized generation, and their children, are slowly challenging and deconstructing France's



relationship of domination that it cultivated toward its historically-colonized communities.

According to Mustapha Amokrane, a member of Zebda, they do this by saying, "I am French. I don't have the same culture as you, but I am French, and I'm not dominated by you." The Maghribis now possess the one weapon the French had over them: French citizenship.

*"If by chance you end up becoming our equals, I ask you: in relation to whom and to what will we be civilized, us?"*

### **For love of one's country**

The second message Cherfi transmits to his readers in "Carnage" is an intense patriotism, which he conveys through the French literary tradition of feminizing the nation and romanticizing his relationship with it. Cherfi declares an unconditional love for his country, saying, much like a wedding vow, he will "promise in front of pediments of the town halls to love France for better or for worse, to protect it, to cherish it up until its final breath."

Patriotism, which is most commonly defined as a positive love of one's own country (Li and Brewer, 2004), has been the driving force and glue of all varieties of human societies for centuries, from tribes, to nations and nation-states, and to empires. As a form of social identification, patriotism often increases as conflict increases—particularly when this conflict is international—(Feschbach, 1987) as a response to perceived outside threats (Li and Brewer). This phenomenon has been played out in the U.S. most notably in the past few decades (albeit in different ways), with patriotism surging in the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attacks, the Cold War, the Iran Hostage Crisis, the Gulf Wars, and, most of all, 9/11 (McLean 75).



*The New Yorker*. 2001.

Granted, sentiments of patriotism can be complicated by opinions on foreign policies and international conflicts, and 9/11 is no exception, as many argue it was a response to failed American foreign policy. However, what further complicates the response and impacts of the 9/11 terrorist attacks—arguably the most important event in modern American history—is that the perpetrators of the attacks were from an Arab and Muslim background that many American citizens share, acting in response to failed American foreign policies in regions that many American citizens are originally from. So when former President Bush wages war on an Arab

country and invokes imperative patriotism (Salaita, 2005) by saying, "You're either with us or against us," where do Arab-Americans fall? In 2002, Shibley Telhami, a senior fellow in the Project on U.S.-Islamic Relations at Brookings Institute, wrote that both Arab and Muslim communities in America "have asserted their American identity as never before" (Telhami, 2002). In addition, according to an October 2001 Zogby International poll he cited, 69 percent of Arab Americans supported "an all-out war against countries which harbor or aid terrorists," and 65 percent of Arab Americans said they felt embarrassed because the attacks were committed by people from Arab countries.

The November 13, 2015 Paris terrorist attacks are not any less complex than America's 9/11, and have produced similar impacts, starting with a rise in patriotism. According to an article published in *The New York Times* almost two weeks after the attacks, the number of people seeking to enlist in the French army increased fourfold to roughly 1,500 a day — a surge similar to the 38,000 increase in American active-duty personnel within the two years after 9/11 (Alderman). The French rise in patriotism was not only demonstrated through the motivation to defend the security of their country, but also to defend their culture. Within a week of the attacks, Ernest Hemingway's memoir about his time in 1920s Paris, *A Movable Feast*, became the No. 1 bestseller on Amazon's French website and sold out. The French publisher Folio reported that sales increased from an average of 10 to 15 copies a day to 500 (Flood).

Thus, Cherfi's "Carnage" was not at all out of place in the context of the attacks. And like Arab-Americans after 9/11, Cherfi's ode to France was his attempt to brandish his patriotism. "In the context of the attacks, I wanted to say, 'Listen, we are French — more than you think,' Cherfi told me. "We are patriotic, we are in love with this country, and we love it with its rules."

Despite this attention, however, Cherfi's letter drew hefty amounts of critiques, especially from his fellow band members. "I think that Magyd strategically wrote this letter at the epitome of irrational emotion," Mustapha Amokrane said to me. "What he says in the letter, to me, is 'Today, I become French.' I say no, I was French before." Cherfi's brother, Tayeb, held the same opinion as Amokrane, calling the letter a personal betrayal to the cause that Zebda and Taktikollectif had been fighting for for decades. Amokrane explained to me that Cherfi's letter not only betrays their cause, but also discredits it:

He says 'I become French today,' which means, 'Before I wasn't.' But this is often used by adversaries to discredit and discriminate against you. For 20, 30 years, in all the suburbs of France, there are people that have been fighting for the recognition of this citizenship. (His letter proves) 'Yes, if we didn't consider you to be French, it's also your fault because you are ambiguous.' Because he isn't clear, I think.

The consequences Amokrane predicted ended up playing out on the popular national French talk show, *On n'est pas couché*, which is known for its grilling, interrogation-style interviews of its guests. Cherfi was invited on the show on October 29, 2016, after the publication and buzz over his new book. Throughout the interview, Cherfi's body language clearly gave away his nervousness and discomfort as the show became increasingly heated while touching on extremely sensitive topics. In the middle of the segment, "Carnage" came up in conversation, and one of the guest hosts, journalist Vanessa Burggraf, accusingly interrogated him about the text she called "deeply moving."

B: Did you have to wait for these terrorist attacks to have this declaration of love for France?

C: No, of course not. The text was written conditionally, it was a conditional metaphor. You have to read a bit from the side (?) like this.

B: But you don't write it in the conditional (mood), you write it in the present. So did you have to wait until the terrorist attacks of November 13 to feel fully French?

C: Of course not. It was my way of saying here it is, being French (?). But what I wanted to say is, I became it too early (?), there were the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks, there were the Republican protests. The tricolor in me joined this Republican term, "*Je suis Charlie*." And when I arrived to this crowd, the people... looked at me and said, "But where are you guys?!" And I had become Arab once again. I had become Muslim once again. And it is in this aspect of incredible condemnation that schizophrenia persists.

Cherfi contradicted himself with his answers to Burggraf's questions multiple times in other interviews, including in the two separate times I spoke to him. The first time I asked Cherfi about "Carnage" and the impacts of the attacks on his identity and patriotism was in October 2016 at the *Institut du Monde Arabe* (Arab World Institute) in Paris, after his book talk. At the time, he told me that the attacks had no impact on his internal identity, and that he had simply written "Carnage" to prove his Frenchness and patriotism externally, to others. However, the second time I spoke to him during a one-on-one interview in December 2016, he said the opposite. "The attacks lifted out of me, it's true, that at the heart, I am more French than I thought," he told me. "I had the impression that (the terrorists) had killed me. They resent me for the fact that I am French. And so immediately I wanted to say, 'Yes, I am French, and I love France more than anything.'"





Massarah Mikati. "Liberté, égalité, fraternité." 2016. Noisy-le-Sec, Paris.

### Becoming Uncle Tom

Almost a year after the attacks, Cherfi furthered his declaration of patriotism and belonging to France with the publication of his new novel, *My Gaulois Side*. This novel, which Cherfi calls a romanticized autobiography, recounts his last year of high school as he prepared to take the Baccalaureate exam. According to Cherfi, he was the first in his poor neighborhood, the Izards, to accomplish this feat, which he attributes to his mom. Cherfi's account, however, is much more complex than simply passing high school. The Baccalaureate exam signifies the successful graduation from *l'école républicaine* into French society, giving the student a credible stamp of approval of their Frenchness.

*"I found that they wanted to put you in boxes to make you think in a certain way, and you couldn't divert from this."*

*L'école républicaine* is yet another centralized institution that is designed to construct, mold and preserve the model of the French citizen. It does this by supposedly erasing social inequalities, fostering shared values and providing a space for freedom of consciousness (Bowen 163). However, in its idealistic objective to construct, mold and preserve the model of the French citizen, it becomes yet another thorn on the rose of French identity by constructing, molding and preserving systemic and institutionalized discrimination, and the spirit of the *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission) of colonialism.

27-year-old Mounir, of Moroccan background, spoke to me about his own issues and difficulties with *l'école républicaine* as he was growing up:

I stopped going to school at 17 because it was my way of rejecting the system, *l'école républicaine*, what it practiced. I found that they wanted to put you in boxes to make you think in a certain way, and you couldn't divert from this. They'll tell you the ancestors are the *Gaulois* (Gallic), they barely talk about colonization. So when you have this critical view and mind, you ask yourself why, and you arrive at certain truths which are occulted. And we move on to silence in the national education, where they teach us something that's incomplete. So I developed a repudiation and denial of the academic system, completely pulled myself out and did my own education.

The problematic notion and intention of *l'école républicaine* was explored in French pop culture, such as the 2008 French film *The Class*. This film is based off the 2006 semi-autobiography written by François Bégaudeau about his time as a French language and literature teacher in an *école républicaine* in the 20th *arrondissement* of Paris, which is comprised of a very high and dense ethnic population. By focusing on the theme of French language and literature, the film heavily highlights, exposes and ridicules the clash of white and ethnic French cultures, and the use of French language and literature to maintain the status quo of the dominant

whites and dominated ethnic. The literature that is studied in Bégadeau's (François Marin in the film) classroom is consistently perceived to be too difficult for the students, who repeatedly question the use of proper "white" French language and its purpose, or lack thereof. The question of what is truly needed to be advanced and civilized is posed through the question of language, and the students introduce a new slang language which correlates with their bridge ethnic French culture.

And so there is Mounir's total rejection of the system, and the students debating and questioning the system in *The Class*. Enter Magyd Cherfi and *My Gaulois Side*. In his new novel and in the reality outside of it, Cherfi exhibits the loss of self that results from the attempt to become and be accepted as French, while painting negative and stereotypical images of the *banlieues* and the Maghribis who live there in the background.

Cherfi starts off his novel nostalgically reminiscing the time that he and his fellow Maghribis felt they were truly French, "The time of the young school that wanted us to have equal rights. We loved this 'we' that made us brothers with the 'straight-haired'" (Cherfi 21). But this did not come without a catch, as he recalled, "I entered its orders and the ranks, but, weirdly, integrating in one (identity) was leaving the other," (25). I was delighted with the first few chapters of the novel, cheering on Cherfi to overcome his identity crisis, challenge the system and reclaim his right to France. However, the further I got into the novel, the more horrified I became as I realized that *l'école républicaine* succeeded in fostering white supremacy and self-shame within Cherfi, as he was climbing the ladder to success by giving into white peoples' stigmatized dialogue of the Maghribi community and the areas which they densely populate: *les banlieues*.



*Banlieue* literally translates to suburb in English, however there are many more images, implications and complexities packaged with this term. I'll never forget one of my good friend's mom's reactions to me telling her I was going to some of the Parisian suburbs to conduct interviews. With big eyes and raised eyebrows, she adopted a passionately urgent tone as she told me, "Sarah, you have to be careful — they have these things there called the 'HLM', it's very dangerous."

The *banlieues* and the government-sponsored housing, HLM (*Habitation à Loyer Modéré*, or low-income housing), within them are known to be disadvantaged urban areas with dense minority ethnic populations, particularly the Maghribi (Hargreaves 2005). They began to adopt this demographic identity starting in the 1950s, when France began to bring in Maghribi laborers to reconstruct the country after WWII, during a period they refer to as the *Trente Glorieuses* (The Glorious Thirty) for its exponential economic growth. Upon bringing these migrant workers to the country, however, France placed them at the periphery of its big cities in HLMs under the assumption they would be a temporary labor contribution, out of sight, out of mind. Evidently, they did not remain as temporary as France hoped they would. Eventually, France's glorious thirty years ended with an economic crisis in the 1970s which was accompanied by a social one, and the *banlieues* were the epitome of these crises (Cesari 2005). Today, these physically, socially and economically marginalized areas and their inhabitants are marked by "academic failure, delinquency, drug use, and the highest rate of youth unemployment in all of Europe" (Cesari). Much like the ghettos and inner-cities of America, escaping the *banlieues* is a severe challenge due to racial, ethnic and cultural discrimination.



Massarah Mikati. Low-income housing projects (HLM). 2016. Bobigny, Paris.

The *banlieues* have undergone multiple periods of unrest and flare-ups in response to these disadvantages and discriminations since the late 1970s, most notably in 2005 when two teenagers in the Parisian suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois were electrocuted by a power substation they were hiding in to escape the police (Sahlins 2006). The deaths sparked three weeks of riots in 274 towns, mostly carried out by unemployed teenagers from the *banlieues*, resulting in over 200 million Euros in damage, the arrest of nearly 2,900 rioters and the injuries of 126 police officers and firefighters (Sahlins). While France and the French media was generally shocked by these events, many scholars and academics saw them to be a long-time coming in response to the socioeconomic inequalities these populations face. More recently, in February of 2017,

thousands protested and rioted in the Parisian *banlieues* in response to a police officer allegedly raping 22-year-old black youth worker, Theo, with a police baton (*Al Jazeera*).

French media and public figures feed off such events to push negative discourse about these areas, often referring to the *banlieues* and their inhabitants (particularly the youth) as having dysfunctional sexualities prompting "macho" behavior, being unwilling to integrate in French society and culture, and possessing an innate violence (Hargreaves 2005). A plethora of research has been produced that has shown the contrary: these youths have in fact integrated within French society.



Massarah Mikati. Low-income housing projects (HLM). 2016. Bondy, Paris.

This is not to say, though, that every youngster of Maghribi descent will identify more with France than with his/her origins. One day, in an attempt to hear more from this youth, I spent an afternoon in front of a high school in the Parisian suburb of Bondy with 20-year-old

Ilies Brahimi (of Algerian descent) and his friend, who grew up in the neighborhood and were alumni of the school. The two young men stopped every student they believed to be Maghribi in a forward manner. "O! What are you?" they bluntly yelled at passersby. When I asked how they could tell who the Maghribis were, Brahimi told me it was obvious. He started pointing to each student that passed us: "*Rebeu*, not *Rebeu*, *Rebeu*, not *Rebeu*." (*Rebeu* is Arab in *verlan*, a French slang that inverts words). I asked the students who stopped for Brahimi for their reflections on their identity. For one young girl of Algerian descent, Lydia, deciding if she identifies more with Algeria or France is impossible.

I know in France my religion and origins don't give me an advantage, but I'm not going to say I don't like France. I was born and raised in Paris, I speak French, I love French culture and Algerian culture, and I feel that I am both. I know we're not necessarily very welcomed in France, but I could never leave.

Lydia is more similar to Zebda in that she identifies with both countries and cultures, and expresses her patriotism and loyalty through "voice." For other teenagers, though, choosing is an option. French-Moroccan Ali, for instance, chose Morocco, though he was hesitant to pick one at first (the repetitive and enthusiastic questioning from Brahimi eventually prompted him to pick one). "If I really had to pick, I'd say Morocco, because it's a Muslim country," he told me. ("I was like that myself at his age," Brahimi then said to me). Abdel, on the other hand, was much more confident about his choice. Of Egyptian-Algerian descent, Abdel told me he identifies much more as Arab than as French. "Personally, I never felt French. We're really rejected in this country as Arabs and Muslims," he told me. "I know that later on in life, I'm going to live in Egypt or Algeria." I was beginning to understand what Cherfi told me when I spoke to him: "A



lot of young kinds on the streets refuse to identify as French because they're not considered as French. They know they're French, but they understand they're not seen as French on the street."



Massarah Mikati. "Moroccan sauce, Algerian sauce, white sauce!" Tayeb Cherfi exclaimed in a *halal* butcher shop. 2016. Toulouse.

During my time in France, I also discovered that those disenfranchised youths that politicians so often complain about do in fact exist in France. I found a number of individuals who conform to those stereotypes during my time there. 21-year-old Adib, born to a Moroccan father and white mother, told me that in his Parisian suburban neighborhood of Boulogne (which has a mix of social classes), many residents would hang small Qur'ans on the rearview mirrors of their cars every night to prevent vandalization — and it worked. Asma Brahimi, Ilies' 27-year-old sister, told me she was on her fourth iPhone — the previous ones had each been stolen by a

Maghribi. Tayeb Cherfi even admitted to me that he was once a "small thief" when he was young ("I was kind, though," he ensured me). More often than not, if someone were to hit on me in public, it would be someone of Maghribi descent — particularly in the *banlieues*. One day, I decided to go to the Grand Mosque of Paris for the Friday prayer. When I went outside after the prayer, with my head still covered, nearly every young man I passed stared at me and/or made a comment — the irony did not go unnoticed. "*What are you doing?!*" I wanted to scream at them. "*You're just giving them more reason to hate you!*" Granted, these kids are by far the minority, but they do exist. Mahmoud Bourassi, a youth worker in the impoverished Parisian suburb of Bobigny, answered my enraged question:

The problem is that those who are marginalized and stigmatized by society are very sensitive to the way we look at them. When society tells them, "You are useless, you are dangerous, you are violent," instead of responding to the negative look others have of them in a positive way, they react in violence and aggression. They believe that they resist the society that despises them, but in reality they confirm the image that was drawn of them.

When I heard Bourassi's explanation, I remembered my high school U.S. history teacher telling my class something similar about African-Americans, explaining to us the psychological tendency people have to become who they believe others perceive them to be.

*"They know they're French, but they understand they're not seen as French on the street."*

Brahimi has taken it upon herself to shape up the kids she sees conducting themselves poorly. One day, after seeing an obnoxiously noisy group of high schoolers of Maghribi descent

in the metro, Brahimi confronted one of the young girls who got off at the same stop as her.

"Farah, you have to understand that today, you are an ambassador for your country and your religion," she told the young girl. "You are Muslim, you are Algerian, you are responsible for the image. When you do something bad, it's me who pays for it, it's the whole community who pays for it. This is your weapon to fight prejudices."



Massarah Mikati. Kids play soccer outside a high school. 2016. Paris, Bondy.

Cherfi's *My Gaulois Side*, though, has only fed more fire to the flame. Scene after scene of Cherfi's novel depicts negative and stereotypical images of the *banlieues* that public figures have been pushing into mainstream media and public discourse for years, such as men committing violence against women, young boys exhibiting delinquent behavior on the streets, and his neighborhood friends making fun of him for being studious. "Reading is betraying," he said in an interview, much to the discontent of his childhood friends, longtime residents of the Izards, and members of the Maghribi community all over France (Baur). Frederic Mercedal, the

president of the soccer club of the Izards, was caught on tape in a confrontation with Cherfi on the streets of their neighborhood, telling him he shouldn't have said reading was betraying (to which Cherfi responded he never said that, and then that Mercadal did not understand) while showing him pictures of all the kids he coaches that have passed the Baccalaureate just like Cherfi. "We haven't see you for 15 years, Magyd, and now you're going to show the worst of the neighborhood?" he shouted at him in the middle of the sidewalk. "You're creating an amalgam!" At the end of the video, Mercadal and a young man held up a sign to Cherfi that read, "Magyd, the Izards are also the Republic." "I told him, 'You know, the problem is you stigmatize and then you don't say it's a novel, you say it's an autobiography,'" Tayeb told me. "It's difficult because he's a longtime activist of these impoverished neighborhoods, and now he's pedaling back."

Throughout his novel, Cherfi seems to be attempting to dismantle the racial construction of white supremacy by highlighting the struggles he and his friends face because of it, from striving for white physical characteristics that defined beauty standards, to feeling embarrassed by their less "refined" language. However, he does not only contradict this message with strikingly negative depictions of his childhood neighborhood. Those I spoke to seemed to perceive Cherfi as someone who holds himself in a much higher esteem than his community, and painted him as an Uncle Tom who admires and is trying to please the white community. When speaking with me, Cherfi attributed his success (which he claims to be rare in his neighborhood, although others I talked to disagree) to his more white environment:

My whole life, I met French people that shaped me, that transmitted values to me, that critiqued me, that informed me. So, in a way, even *l'école républicaine laïque*, obligatory, free — this school gave me a lot to naturally become French. I shaped myself on the French idea, the Republican idea.



And so, to Cherfi, being French is a philosophical definition. It is the moment that he wants to defend those Republican values of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. And November 13, 2015, was that moment for him, the moment that crystallized his Frenchness. "There are strong moments in life where we must be patriotic," he told me. "Where we must grab our weapons and say, 'Save France!'"



Massarah Mikati. "It is dark in the country of light. My bomb does not kill." Graffiti in the streets of Paris. 2016. Paris.

### Yasser: Attacked Post-Attacks

Two days after the Paris terrorist attacks, French human rights and civil liberties activist Yasser Louati was interviewed on CNN by hosts John Vause and Isha Susa. His eyes were black, his face sunken and drained of color, and his tie crooked — an unusual look for the usually sharp, energetic and put-together man I met a year later. Grieving and sleep-deprived, little did the then-spokesperson for the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) know that this interview would be heavily-discussed internationally as the hosts grilled him about whether the French Muslim community was affiliated with and responsible for the attacks.

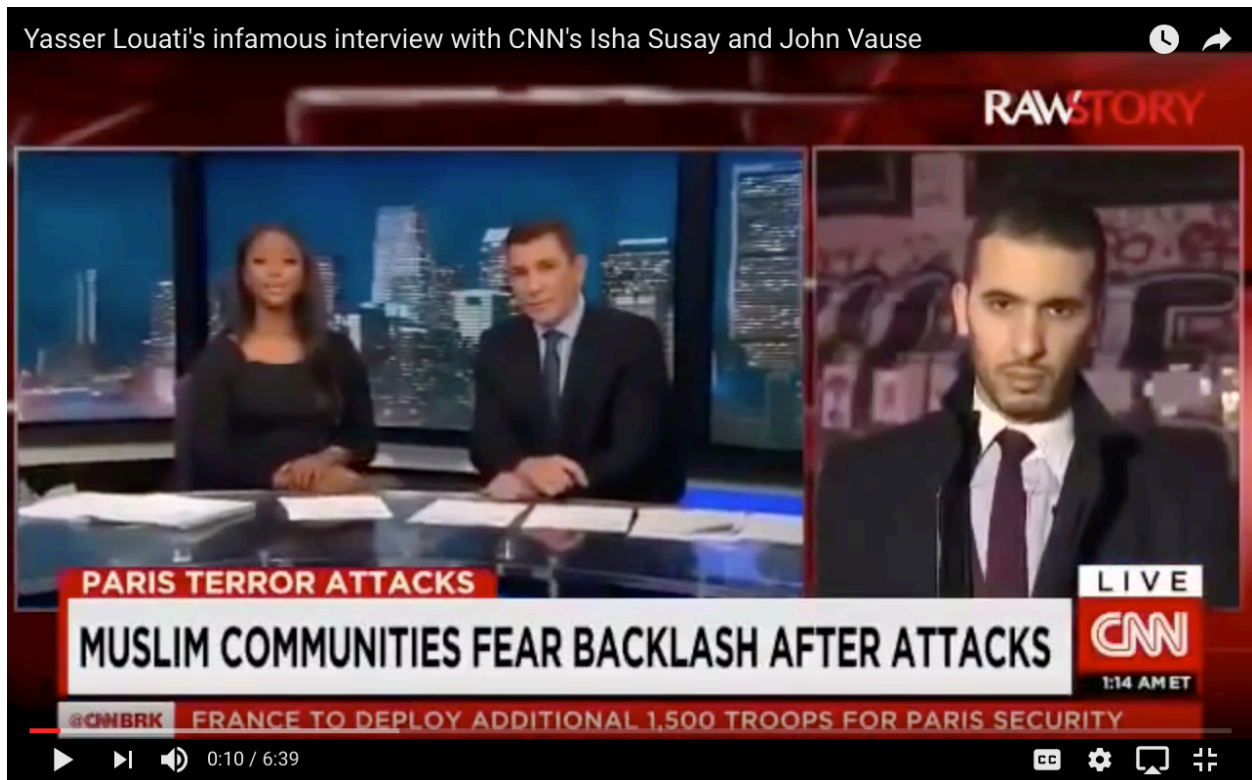
Vause: Yasser, if your camp is the French camp, why is it that no one who is in the Muslim community there in France knew what these guys were up to? Because it seems to me that this was a pretty big plan, surely someone beyond those seven guys... have to have known something, and that was probably within the Muslim community, but yet no one said anything.

Louati: Sir, the Muslim community has *nothing* to do with these guys. We cannot justify ourselves for the actions of someone who claims to be Muslim. The secret services knew about these guys, and... it turned out they were all on a blacklist somewhere, somehow on a desk. So right now we can't take responsibility for anything.

V: Well why not? What is the responsibility within the Muslim community to identify what is happening within their own ranks when it comes to people who are obviously training and preparing to carry out mass murder?

L: No no no no no, sir, no no, they are not from our ranks, if they were trained they were trained abroad, and what these terrorists are blaming our country for is for our failed foreign policy. But of course they will use people who are falling in the trap of social insecurity and of course being cast aside from the rest of French society. So we cannot accept the idea that these people are from us. They are not. They are just the byproduct of our societies exporting their wars abroad and expecting no repercussions back home.

At the end of the interview, Vause frustratedly said he has "yet to hear any condemnation from the Muslim community", telling Susa, "The word 'responsibility' comes to mind."



Yasser Louati (right) interviewed by CNN hosts Isha Susay (left) and John Vause (middle) on November 15, 2015.

This interview was discussed on *Democracy Now!* on November 19, 2016 by Amy Goodman and Pulitzer Prize-winner journalist Glenn Greenwald, who said the interview made him speechless. "To go on and accuse (Louati) of bearing responsibility for the terrorist attacks because he's Muslim and the people who did it are Muslim is so reprehensible," Greenwald said, adding that these journalists would never use the same discourse when talking to Christians or Jews after terrorist attacks from their respective communities. Greenwald pointed out two other major issues and lies in their conversation: firstly, every major Muslim organization from the West did indeed immediately issue statements condemning the attacks. Secondly, it is most definitely not the responsibility of the Muslim community to be aware of such planned attacks.

All of the leading world's intelligence agencies with tens of billions of dollars and massive surveillance infrastructure had no idea about this plot, and yet they're telling Yasser Louati that he and every other Muslim in

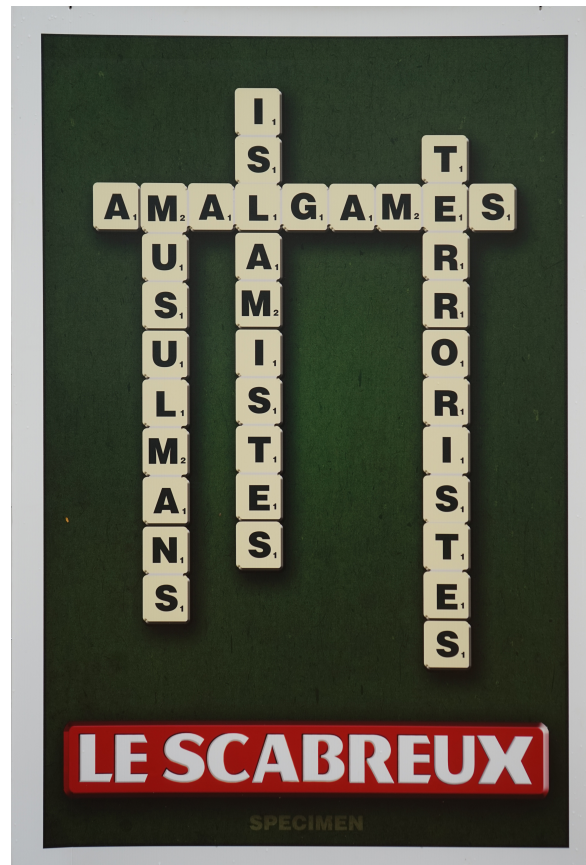
France obviously knew about it and should have stopped it... It's really despicable, but it's what's in the ether, it's absolutely the really scary climate that has emerged in the wake of Paris.

Louati spoke to me about his own reflections on the interview:

I remember I started the interview, and then it was blank because I hadn't slept — I was really distressed by the attacks. I was denied the right to grieve, just as many other Muslims in France. We don't have the right to be sad like the rest of the world. We had to be defensive from the start. It's as if we ourselves were not hit by the attacks. "You guys aren't like us, you can't suffer like us." The suffering was limited to white France.

French Muslims have not only suffered verbal attacks since the terrorist attacks, but also physical. Since the attacks, the French Parliament has voted to extend the country's State of Emergency five times, which gives security services the right to carry out house raids without judicial warrants, place anyone deemed to be a security risk (which is very vaguely defined) under house arrest, dissolve groups considered to be a threat to public order, and block websites that "encourage" terrorism (Dearden). However, this State of Emergency has been raising a great deal of concern among human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Amnesty International's Secretary General Salil Shetty told *The Independent* that France is at a "tipping point" because its State of Emergency has been disproportionately targeting Muslim citizens and citizens of North African descent with its over 4,000 house raids and over 400 house arrests since the attacks (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International), which very often result in the loss of jobs. Despite the international concern over the human rights violations of this State of Emergency, French Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve insists that it has been efficient in detecting and preventing terrorism (considering very few of the arrests have resulted in actual prosecutions, as reported by multiple news outlets, the validity of

this statement is questionable). Yet, many people, including Louati, worry that such clear targeting and abuse of Muslim citizens will in fact fuel the fire and provide more of a push toward "radicalization."



Massarah Mikati. "Scrabble." 2016. Graphic by Ali Guessom of the association Remem'beur, showing how the words "amalgamation", "Muslims", "Islamists" and "terrorists" are being carelessly interchanged. *Origines Contrôlées*. Toulouse.

## On Radicalization

Before discussing radicalization, it is necessary to understand what the term actually means and how it has become a problematic notion. At its core, radicalization means a severe or intense change or stance, and not necessarily in a negative way. However, in recent years, radicalization has come to describe what people who engage in terrorism in the name of Islam

have undergone. "Radicalization has become a catch-all word to vaguely designate what is perceived as an uncontrollable threat and a hazardous label from public politics in a heightened context of jihadist violence," Antoine Jardin, a political scientist at the SciencesPo Institute in Paris, wrote in an op-ed he published in the French daily *Le Monde*. Louati echoed Jardin's concerns, albeit with more passion. "Radicalization is a crazy term we apply to discredit Muslims," he said. "The majority of radicalization is when the French go to the right, but when an Arab joins ISIS it's a radical Islamist. This pushes the dialogue of Islamophobia because the term is always applied to disqualify, discipline and punish Muslim citizens." Despite its problematic meaning, however, for the sake of common ground I will be using the term radicalization with its mainstream implications throughout the rest of this thesis.

There are extremely large bodies of research that have been produced on the process of radicalization, and while it is difficult to find and agree upon clear-cut causes, this research has overall helped identify a number of indicators. One of the most prominent and well-known theories is the "Staircase to Terrorism", coined by Fathali Moghaddam, a political scientist at Georgetown University. According to Moghaddam, as the name suggests, the path that leads to terrorism is a gradual process of stepping stones that build upon one another, each condition and sentiment leading to the next step. The ground floor of this staircase is the individual's perception of their injustice and inequality, and subsequent sense of shame. As a result, they climb to the first floor, where they attempt to find solutions for this injustice. The second floor is what begins to separate the active and mobilized citizens from terrorism-prone individuals, as this is where more aggressive people begin to search for actions where they can physically displace their aggression. This physical action becomes justified by the belief they are

participating in moral engagement on the third floor, and is further solidified by an us-versus-them mentality (as well as little-to-no escape options) on the fourth. Finally, the staircase terminates on the fifth floor: The act of terrorism.

*"It's more a message to these young people, 'Here you have your space, you're part of a bigger something, a social community.'"*

I spoke to Moghaddam in 2015 when writing an article on the psychology of ISIS' young Western recruits. "The central theme in 'The Staircase to Terrorism' is identity," he told me at the time. "A number of (young people) have problems in the West because they don't feel they belong to important groups. No identities are satisfying for them." Thomas Schmidinger, a political scientist at Vienna University who has conducted various studies on radicalized European youths going to join ISIS, echoed Moghaddam's theories. Schmidinger stressed that these youth tend to have strong feelings of alienation due to socioeconomic, personal and/or psychological problems. "It's not a religiousness," he told me, explaining that most recruits were actually coming from mainly secular backgrounds. "It's more a message to these young people, 'Here you have your space, you're part of a bigger something, a social community.'"

In France, there are two renowned sociologists who have become the leading voices on Islamist radicalization in the country: Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy. The mainstream media has taken to pitting them against each other in its portrayal of their viewpoints. In short, Kepel theorizes that in terms of Islamist terrorism, Islam is being radicalized, whereas Roy says that radicalization is being Islamized. Jardin, who collaborated with Kepel on his recently-published

book *Terror in the Hexagon: The Genesis of French Jihad*, has a problem with this presentation of their viewpoints:

I think presented like this is too schematic. Kepel says that in Islam, there are radical trends that have taken power and gained an audience it didn't have before, and which today reaches the youth of the post-colonial phenomenon in Europe. The jihadists changed their communication, they used more internet, video and culture and they touched the youth in a stronger manner. Oliver Roy says it's not religion that made these people become violent. They are radical because of their social conditions, their thought process, and they would have accepted another framework for their radicalism and thirst for violence had they not been introduced to Islam. Islam is a pretext, but not an explanatory factor.

Evidently, Jardin agrees more with Kepel, saying jihadist groups use religious doctrine to legitimize and justify their cause in their propaganda. He stressed to me that it's not to say that Islam actually causes radicalization, but in the Muslim world there are plenty of political Islamist groups, under the umbrella of which exist groups that use violence and terrorism.

Journalist and essayist Dominique Vidal, however, agrees more with Roy's theory, calling his expression, "Islamization of radicalism" a "profound" and "beautiful slogan." Vidal has an outgoing and quirky personality. He wore brightly-colored pants with checkered button-up shirts and a bow tie both times I saw him. His glasses are framed by rosy red cheeks, wiry eyebrows and curly, gray and white hair. He donned a chunky, silver ring with Hebrew engravings on his pinky, representing his Jewish heritage, though he himself identifies as atheist. As we sat in a café in the *Place d'Italie* neighborhood in the south of Paris, he spoke to me with unregulated passion and enthusiasm.

Everyone says that Islam is the problem, but the majority of young jihadists among French youth are *français de Souche* (French at the roots, or white). *Souche* is the base of an expression that's evidently idiotic, meaning these young French are of Gallic origin (he said this with



exaggerated sarcasm). I think that it's the economic and social conditions in which the youth have lived, their childhood, their adolescence, the ghettoization, the racism, the humiliation — it's really important. Another important part is psychology. To do what the jihadists do, somewhere you have to be *crazy*. It's a form of mental illness. I think that the truth, if there is a truth, is that it's an accumulation of all these factors, and especially *not* Islam. There is a part associated with Islam, but there are just as many links with psychiatric problems. Look at the guy from Nice: He didn't eat *halal*, he did drugs, is *that* a *halal*?

Throughout my years of studying the Middle East, Arab world and Muslim world, as well as through my own Muslim background, I've developed my own theory, or rather, rhetorical question, on whether Islam is an inherently violent, terrorism-breeding religion. Islam was founded in the year 610 A.D., thus has been around for well over a millenia. Yet, Islamist terrorism did not start popping up until the mid- to late-20th century, which coincidentally was the same period during which the Muslim world was being ravaged, exploited and destroyed by imperialism and colonialism—not to mention the fact that there have been terrorist organizations that have justified their horrendous acts with other religious texts, including the Bible and the Torah. So, is Islam an inherently violent religion?

### **Does France have a radicalization problem?**

In March of 2016, Will McCants and Christopher Meserole of the Brookings Institute in Washington, D.C. published a short essay in *Foreign Affairs* titled "The French Connection." Upon empirically testing common explanations for terrorism on foreign fighter data they retrieved from the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, they found that the top predictor of radicalization in a country was whether the country was Francophone. Four of the five countries with the highest rates of radicalization worldwide (Tunisia, Lebanon, Belgium and France), and the top two in Europe (France and Belgium), were Francophone. McCants and

Meserole attributed this phenomenon to "French political culture" — namely, the universalism previously discussed, and *laïcité*, or France's more extreme and somewhat opposite version of secularism that serves to conceal religion rather than allow the freedom to express it. Meserole reflected on the research more in-depth on his website:

Popular conceptions that it is not possible to have both a western or secular nationalist identity, and also a Muslim one... helps jihadist recruiters who want to sign up Muslims who believe they don't belong. Note that in jihadist texts, a core strategic goal of carrying out attacks in the west is to force western societies to over-react such that they start discriminating against their Muslim populations. In that sense, the ultimate goal of the violence is not so much to kill as it is to force the Muslims within these populations to make a black and white choice between identifying as Muslim and identifying as western.

McCants and Meserole pointed out that, for instance, France and Belgium are the only European countries to issue bans on the full veil in public schools. Many scholars, however—particularly the French—were outraged by McCants' and Meserole's study and the conclusions they drew from it. Simond de Galbert, Benjamin Haddad and Iskander Rehman penned a response to the essay in *The American Interest*, which they titled "Misconnecting the Dots." The scholars warned that McCants' and Meserole's study dangerously relied more on correlation than clearly demonstrated causation, said that "French political culture" is not a monolith that can be applied to the four countries in question, and argued that "the role played by 'aggressive' secularism (on radicalization) appears limited." What caught my interest in their response, however, was the very last paragraph:

*Laïcité* has long been criticized in the United States for the restrictions it is believed to put on Muslims' religion freedom. All too often, however, U.S. hostility towards the concept rests on a misunderstanding of French history and culture, and the complex legalistic intricacies of the implementation of *laïcité* in French society.

This argument is one that I heard multiple times when I spoke to French people, particularly white scholars, about *laïcité*. They frequently complained that Anglo-Saxons did not know how to study and discuss their society because they simply "didn't understand." So, let's try to understand.



Massarah Mikati. "Church does not equal State." 2016. Paris.

## On Laïcité

*Laïcité* was founded in the year 1905 as a separation of church and state. It "assures the liberty of conscience" of French citizens, and "the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction to their origin, race, or religion. It respects all religious beliefs" (*Vie publique — au cœur du débat publique*). Essentially, *laïcité* was established in an effort to close and resolve the long conflict between the French Republic and Catholic institutions, which dates all the way back to the French Revolution (the previously-discussed establishment of a powerful state was seen as a way to assert independence from the overly-powerful Catholic institution). However,

whereas the U.S. form of secularism gives all citizens the right to practice and express their religion, France only allows this outside of the public sphere (which is vaguely understood to be state institutions). Once individuals cross into the public sphere, they must adhere to what is referred to as the "social contract." In 2003, French political philosopher Blandine Kriegel explained the French interpretation of the social contract to American anthropologist John Richard Bowen:

We hold strongly to the principle of *laïcité*. We have to place ourselves in the public space, by abstracting from our individual characteristics, from where we came from, our roots... and accept the transfer of certain rights to the Law. That is the contract: we move from pluralism to unity through consent (Bowen 14).

She went on to describe the concept of *laïcité* and its difference from freedom of religion, saying, "In Anglo-Saxon thinking... it is the concrete individual who has rights; freedom of conscience is the foundation. In our tradition these liberties are guaranteed through political power, which guarantees a public space that is neutral with respect to religion" (Bowen 15). So, whereas Anglo-Saxon political theory guarantees freedom *from* the state, French political theory guarantees freedom *through* the state.

When *laïcité* was established in 1905, however, the Muslim population in France was rather limited, and thus its application went fairly smoothly. It wasn't until influxes of Muslim immigrants began arriving in France that *laïcité* began to pose a problem. "France, even before the question of Islam, already had problems with religion," Mahmoud Bourassi, a youth worker in the impoverished northern Parisian suburb of Bobigny, explained to me. "France has a problem with Islam in particular because it is a religion that is visible. In addition, the Muslims

came to remind us of the application of *laïcité* towards a population that was difficult to be recognized as French, as part of the narrative of the nation."

Conflict and tension began to rise in the 1980s between France and its Muslim citizens, as many first-generation French-Maghribis visibly sought refuge in their Muslim identities as a solution to their lack of belonging to both the French and Maghribi cultural identities. France was increasingly threatened by this developing phenomenon, partially because they wanted to protect *laïcité* but also because of Islam's affiliation with sensitive issues such as colonialism, the Algerian War, and the *banlieues*. The tension climaxed in 1989 when three schoolgirls were expelled after refusing to take off their *hijabs*, which the principal believed to be an inappropriate expression of religion in *l'école républicaine*, one of the state institutions where *laïcité* and the social contract were expected to be adhered to. While the French administrative court ordered the schoolgirls to be reinstated, they later ended up passing a law in 2003 forbidding signs of religion in public schools — a law many knew was mainly targeting the *hijab*. The law went into effect in 2004, resulting in 47 expulsions countrywide for refusal to remove religious signs, 550 incidents resolved through dialogue, and 96 students leaving *l'école républicaine* for private schools, home schooling or enrolling in another country, during the 2004-2005 academic year. In addition, several hundred girls never showed up at school (Bowen 150).



Massarah Mikati. "Chart of *laïcité* at school." 2016. Paris.

In an article he published in *Foreign Policy*, Robert Zaretsky, a historian at University of Houston, wrote about the radical evolution of *laïcité* in its face-off with its Muslim citizens:

The banner of *laïcité* was unfurled in ways that would surely have been unrecognizable to the 19th-century statesmen like Jules Ferry and Aristide Briand, who helped write the original law. The once-straightforward guarantees of “freedom of conscience” and “free exercise of religious faiths” — rooted in and restricted to the constitutions of the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Republics — were transformed under the forces of political passion and mounting existential anguish into the defining French values, and any form of retreat from a fundamentalist interpretation was a failure to defend the republic.

One crisp October day, as I was taking a stroll through Toulouse to explore the city before the "Controlled Origins" festival was set to begin, I came across one of the "fundamentalist" French citizens Zaretsky wrote about: Chantal Roger. Roger and I crossed paths on a pedestrian square in the heart of Toulouse, and began talking when I asked if I could pet her two-year-old Corgi. Roger is a middle-aged woman with a caramel-colored bob; tan, weathered skin; and glasses that frame the crinkles around her brown eyes. She is kind and talkative, which is quite a distinction from most French strangers I had met, and which made other French Corgi owners we passed visibly uncomfortable and baffled.

Once we began talking, Roger asked me where I was from (apparently my accent in French is English), discovered my Lebanese background (to which she responded, "Oh, we love the Lebanese!") and then found out about the topic of my thesis. "Well, things were already very complicated before, but they sure did become more complicated after the attacks," she exasperatedly told me. About 10 minutes into our conversation, Roger asked me if I was Catholic or Maronite. "Neither," I responded. "I'm Muslim." The wrinkles on her face became more exaggerated and apparent as her jaw dropped in shock and her eyebrows raised to the top of her forehead. "You're Muslim?!" she exclaimed. "But how? How is that? You are so open-minded! You seem... normal!"

*"You pass other Muslims and all day you become more shocked because it's not the same, they're less cultivated."*

I've experienced my fair share of Islamophobia throughout my lifetime, but most of it comprised of hateful, aggressive and false accusations about my faith. What was sure was that I had never experienced the passive aggressive, condescending racism Roger had just exhibited — so played along. We chatted while walking Louie for nearly an hour, talking about everything from the predominantly-North African Sunday market that encircled the Basilica of Saint-Sernin (which she called "one culture invading and overthrowing another" when I said it was a nice symbol of multiculturalism) to *laïcité* ("Honestly, I'm not sure what it means," she said, after arguing that it must be defended. "You'll have to ask my son about that.") So the next day, I did meet with her and her son, Alex, who is a PhD candidate at Toulouse University in his early 30s, writing his dissertation on the Jacobins of Toulouse during the French Revolution. Needless to say, the backgrounds and personalities of this mother and son were an interesting combination relevant to my research.

The next morning, as I met with Chantal and Alex for a coffee in the old city, Chantal introduced me to her son as, once again, "normal." I later realized by normal she meant that I didn't wear the *hijab*, had "Occidental" clothes and wasn't "aggressive" about my religion ("How do the Muslims pray five times a day? That just seems unrealistic to me," she later questioned).

"You see Muslims like Sarah, we find this normal because it's not bothersome," she explained to her son. "But then you pass other Muslims and all day you become more shocked because it's not the same, they're less cultivated." Most of her sentences started with, "I don't mean to sound racist, but..." She repeatedly said that "visible" Muslims were just trying to provoke the rest and declare social revenge, citing examples of Muslims who wanted gender-segregated hours at the public pool or refused to eat pork. Once she started talking about



Muslims profiting from France's social welfare system, however, Chantal was mixing xenophobia, classism, cultural racism and religious racism too much for the comfort of her son. "This has nothing to do with religion," Alex said to her. "They're just not integrated. But we see people who are fairly more respectful than others, and I think there's a contradiction. This is why I have a hard time amalgamating." Alex, too, however, fell into the trap of the vague and hypocritical definition of mainstream *laïcité*, telling me, "Part of the problem is in the past 30-40 years, there has been a decrease of Christianity in France and a rise of Islam. The Muslims aren't more numerous, but they are more religious." I responded, "Why would that matter if a country is truly *laïque*?", and Chantal enthusiastically exclaimed, "You understand *laïcité*! Voilà!"

Louati refers to this newfound application of *laïcité* referred to by Zaretsky and exhibited by the Rogers as "violent exclusion and domination", and believes that this radical *laïcité* leads to breeding grounds for terrorism, just as McCants and Meserole argued in their study.

When you have the neutrality of the state and you guarantee the autonomy of religious organizations it's a great thing, it's the protection of religions and religious minorities. But the Muslims couldn't profit from *laïcité* because as soon as they became visible, (France) transformed *laïcité*, it turned constitutional principles into an ideological tool — now *laïcité* is the neutrality of individuals in the public space. This is what causes problems. So byproduct of *laïcité* that is used for domination and humiliation is people saying, "To hell with that." It's not a coincidence that France has the largest Muslim community in Europe, but is also the country that discriminates against its Muslim population the most, *and* it's also the no. 1 exporter of foreign fighters. The elements are there.

From the January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, to the November 2015 Paris attacks, to the 2016 Nice attacks, we are constantly seeing a trend of homegrown terrorists attacking the lands they grew up in — a phenomenon that has yet to be seen in the U.S. It is clear that the combination of the socioeconomic conditions of the Maghribi population in France, the

complexities of their identities further complicated by a sensitive and largely unaddressed violent colonial past, and France's stubborn clinging to universalism, the social contract and *laïcité* would unsurprisingly result in the country's highest rates of radicalization worldwide.

### **Divide and Conquer**

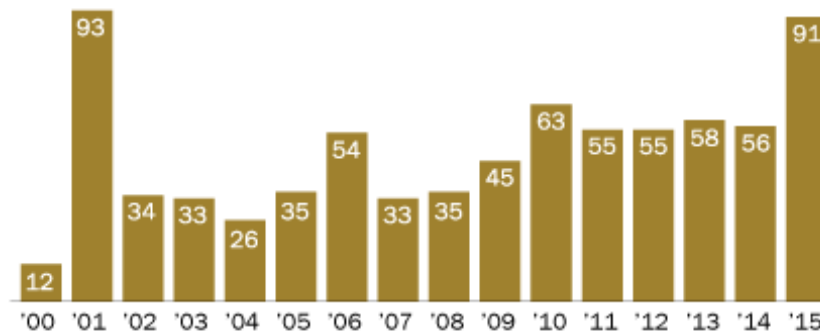
While the question of whether France's societal structure is a breeding ground for homegrown terrorism is an extremely important one to address, the fact that this linkage between *laïcité*, Islam and terrorism is being discussed in the first place has critical implications of its own; an implication the whole world witnessed through Louati's interview with CNN: The Muslim community is being blamed, targeted and stigmatized with each terrorist attack, rather than the actual reasons these terrorist attacks are taking place. The stigmatization of the Muslim community post-attacks has paved the way for two ongoing developments within French society. First, the increased marginalization and ostracization of the Muslim community and its Maghribi counterparts delivers fighters to terrorist groups, namely ISIS, on a silver platter, as it heightens risk of radicalization for the reasons discussed above. Second, and on the other hand, this stigmatization has urgently pushed a discussion in both the white and Maghribi communities about French identity and belonging, providing Maghribis a silver lining of an opportunity to take the microphone and reclaim what is theirs.

In the aftermath of terrorist attacks, the rise of Islamophobia is a common trend. In fact, many scholars attribute rises of Islamophobia to Islamist terrorist attacks and presidential campaigns (Burke), along with significant global events. For instance, after the killing of Osama Bin Laden, former head of the Al Qaeda terrorist group, Islamophobia saw a slight spike in the U.S. (Nisbet 2011). This theory has recently been drastically proven with the FBI's 2015 hate

crime statistics released in November of 2016, which found that Islamophobic hate crimes in 2015—during the U.S. presidential campaign—were at the highest rates the U.S. has seen since 2001, jumping 67 percent from 2014.

### Anti-Muslim assaults at highest level since 2001

*Anti-Muslim assaults reported to the FBI*



Note: Includes simple and aggravated assaults.

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation

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In addition, according to U.S. think tank Demos, Islamophobic English-written tweets peaked worldwide in July of 2016, from 2,500 per day in April to 7,000 per day in July. France has not diverged from this trend, either. According to the CCIF's 2016 report, the activist organization received 2,536 solicitations resulting in the recording of 905 Islamophobic acts in 2015 (the year of both the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks and the Paris terrorist attacks) — an 18.5 percent increase from the preceding year.



Massarah Mikati. "Antisemitism, 'Blackphobia', Islamophobia. The fault of a universal vaccine!" Graphic by Ali Guessom of the association Remem'beur. 2016  
*Origines Contrôlées*. Toulouse.

"The perception was already not very positive with regards to Islam in France, but I had the impression that French public opinion tended to be distant from what they were told (in the media)," Bourassi told me. "But now, the recent attack that took place created a real fear that prevents people from reasoning." Chantal Roger admitted that irrational fear to me, saying that after the attacks she, and other French, were less racist. "The French are more sensitive now toward Muslims, we're more critical and more resentful," she said. One 21-year-old of Malagasy descent I met, Loïc, told me that even he experienced racism after the terrorist attacks, which he attributes to his dark complexion and facial hair. For two weeks after the attacks, he said that during both the morning and evening commutes on the metro, no one would sit on any of the seats near him — the metro would be packed, people would be standing, and he would have four

seats to himself. "It hurt my heart," he said to me. "They always gave me dirty looks, too, and I didn't know what to do." Magyd Cherfi gave me his insight on the rift that took place despite his unifying attempt with "Carnage":

The immigrant community felt targeted as guilty, especially the Muslim community. So there was a sense of guilt in the Muslim community, and a sense of mistrust in the French community toward the Muslims — an additional fracture that needed to be stitched back together. Seeing as the Muslim community felt it wasn't welcome, it didn't feel it was in solidarity with the white French — notably because there were marches and protests to save the society of the Republic, and it's true that Muslims did not go because they felt themselves discriminated in reality, and so they couldn't find points of solidarity.

Evidently, although this rise of Islamophobia is in response to terrorism caused by radicalization, it ends up becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy by creating further motivation and push toward radicalization because of the subsequent marginalization and stigmatization. On the other hand, however, the terrorist attacks have also created an opposing development: reclaiming belonging, patriotism and nationality.

*"I'd say that a real reflection was born. How to be, how to take the mic, how to position yourself, how to speak, how to act."*

Bourassi told me that the French "have emotions now that push people to have attitudes that can be dangerous for national cohesion, for living together, and for the Muslim population." Despite the evident discrimination against the Muslim community and perceptions of injustice and racism, though, a 2016 Pew Research Center poll actually found that (only) 29 percent of France's population viewed Muslims negatively — surprisingly the second-lowest rate in all of Europe. Does this mean that there is hope for the Muslim and Maghribi populations in France?

"I'd say that a real reflection was born," Amokrane told me. "How to be, how to take the mic, how to position yourself, how to speak, how to act." He said that although they have yet to find the answers to these questions, the fact that this reflection was born is, in and of itself, a positive outcome. Cherfi echoed his sentiments, saying that since the attacks the cards have been back on the table in re-questioning and redefining French identity. "It's a feeling that is ultimately positive, because these questions were not on the table before," he told me. "It's time to ask the question of what we are, where we are going, and what do we want." And many younger generation French citizens of Maghribi descent have already found the answers to these questions.

### Nawelle: A French Islam?

On the day of the Paris terrorist attacks, *The New York Times* published an article recapping and details of the catastrophic event. What caught many people's eye, though, was a reader's comment on the article that *The New York Times* ended up bookmarking on the page.

The comment, written by Laurence Hauben, described her image of France and reflection on the attacks:

France embodies everything religious zealots everywhere hate: enjoyment of life here on earth in a myriad (of) little ways: a fragrant cup of coffee and buttery croissant in the morning, beautiful women in short dresses smiling freely on the street, the smell of warm bread, a bottle of wine shared with friends, a dab of perfume, children playing in the Luxembourg Gardens, the right not to believe in any god, not to worry about calories, to flirt and smoke and enjoy sex outside of marriage, to take vacations, to read any book you want, to go to school for free, to play, to laugh, to argue, to make fun of prelates and politicians alike, to leave worrying about the afterlife to the dead.

No country does life on earth better than the French.

Paris, we love you. We cry for you. You are mourning tonight, and we with you. We know you will laugh again, and sing again, and make love, and heal, because loving life is your essence. The forces of darkness will ebb. They will lose. They always do.

The comment quickly went viral on the Internet, spreading from the user's Santa Barbara location all the way to France. People all over the world were quick to respond, thanking Hauben and deeming the comment "insightful and well spoken". The comment was republished in the French daily *Le Monde*, to which many responded that it was "touching" and "completely true". However, there were also many readers who said the comment was an American cliché and an "erroneous image". One of the people disturbed by it was 21-year-old Nawelle Mohammed, who saw the comment when it circulated her Facebook page.

There were people who told me this is written by an American and Americans have fantasies about France, so it wasn't really accurate, but the thing is there were French people that see their identity this way. There were a lot of people who told me that since the attacks took place in places like a concert hall or sidewalk cafes, the terrorists prevented us from living our beautiful lives that are Occidental and free, of partying and women wearing short skirts. They said, 'We, the French, are this.' So we started feeling a discrepancy. You see France like this, but I don't see it this way. My friends and I don't adopt this lifestyle.

Thus, Hauben from Santa Barbara ended up unintentionally encapsulating a major debate sparked by the attacks in her brief comment, as is shown by the variety of responses to the comment: What is France, and what does it mean to be French? Furthermore, where do the Maghribi and Muslim populations fit into these definitions?

Up until this point, we have talked about the status of and relationship between the Maghribi, Muslim and white populations in France. While the white population has had a complex relationship with both the Maghreb and Muslim populations, many have noted a distinctive marker that shifted the relationship and the dialogue about these populations was 9/11. Before, the concerns of mainstream discourse was the "delinquent" youth of the *banlieues*. After, it was more so Islam, "radical" or not. Even more significant of a marker now, however, is November 13, after which the question of whether Islam is "compatible with the values of the French Republic" was repeated nonstop. In this chapter, I will address and discuss the fusion and development of Islam in Western communities and in France. I will then address the looming questions of French identity based on my interviewees' responses, and, finally, what the 2015 Paris attacks mean for France's future.



## Islam and the West

Islam has been present in and contributing to the "Western world" for centuries; from the so-called Golden Age of Islamic Civilization (during which Muslims translated Greek works, invented hospitals and surgical instruments, and prospered in literature), to the communities of Muslims among slaves brought to the U.S., to attendees of lavish world expositions in Europe, to the community's significant role in the American Civil Rights' Movement. Despite this presence, though, there remained frequently negative perceptions of this foreign and unfamiliar religion — not unlike today. For instance, during the Naturalization Era (1790-1952) in the U.S., during which citizenship was restricted to being white, many Arab Christian immigrants were legally deemed white and eligible for citizenship, whereas Arab Muslim immigrants were legally non-white (Beydoun, 2014). However, the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act brought 1.1 million Muslim immigrants to the U.S. While Islamophobia and negative stereotypes abounded, there were three pivotal geopolitical events that really brought the Middle East (and subsequently the amalgamation of Muslims) into the American living room, according to acclaimed media critic Jack Shaheen: the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, the 1970s oil crisis, and the 1979 the Iran hostage crisis (*Reel Bad Arabs*). In Europe, the Middle East had been pertinent for much longer due to colonialism and imperialism.

## [ MOTS DITS ARABES ? ]

**A** abricot • alambic • alcazar • alchimie • alcool • alcôve • algèbre • algorithme • almanach • amalgame • amiral • arcane • arsenal • artichaut • assassin • aubergine • avarie • azimuth **B** baldaquin • baobab • barde • bergamote • bled • bougie **C** caban • cabas • cador • cafard • café • caïd • calibre • camelot • camphre • candi • carafe • caramel • carmin • chat • chemise • chiffre • chimie • 1) clebs - 2) clébard • coton • coupole • cramoisi **D** douane **E** écarlate • échec • élixir • épinard • éponge • estragon **F** fanfaron • fardeau • fissa • flouze **G** gabelle • gingembre • girafe • goudron **H** hasard **J** jaquette • jupe **K** khôl **L** lascar **M** macramé • magasin • massage • matelas • matraque • mazout • mesquin • mohair • momie • mousseline **N** nénuphar • nouba • niquer **O** orange • (oued) **Q** quintal **R** rame/ramette • razzia • raquette • récif **S** safari • sacre • satin • sirop • sofa • sorbet • soude **T** talisman • timbale • tabouret • talc • tambour • tarer • truchement • tarif • toubib **Z** zénith • zouave • zéro • zob ...

**Merci pour leur intégration !**

Massarah Mikati. "Spoken Arabic words? Thank you for their integration!" Graphic by Ali Guessom of the association Remem'beur, portraying how the Arab culture has enriched the French culture. 2016. *Origines Contrôlées*. Toulouse.

With the increased Muslim and Middle Eastern presences in the Western world, questions about the compatibility of particularly Islam in the West arose. Perhaps the most renowned (and controversial) theorist on this topic is Samuel Huntington, a political scientist at Harvard University, who coined the concept of the "Clash of Civilizations" in 1993, after the fall of the Soviet Union. In an often-cited essay published in *Foreign Affairs*, Huntington theorized that the new conflict that would prevail in world politics is cultural divisions between humans, and that nation states would thrive in this conflict. Islamic civilization, he argues, is particularly

troublesome because of its loyalty to religion over nations, and its violent tendencies — "Islam has bloody borders," he wrote. Not surprisingly, his theory gained a large audience after 9/11. However, it also has found a multitude of critics. Historian James Gelvin pointed out three issues with Huntington's thesis. First, it has an inaccurately monolithic view of Muslims. Second, it treats cultures as "billiard balls that bounce off each other", when in reality cultures influence and borrow from one another — strict boundaries do not exist. Third, in accordance with Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, the clash of civilizations thesis ignores the evolution and changes in Islam's history (Gelvin 3). The critiques extended beyond the world of academia. In an op-ed published in *The New York Times* in 2011, columnist David Brooks wrote that the Arab Spring debunked many of Huntington's claims about the Middle East's lack of desire for liberty and democracy. In 2015, writer Robert Wright published an article in *The New Yorker* titled "The Clash of Civilizations That Isn't", pointing out the flaws in blaming terrorism and ISIS' war with the West on Islam itself:

You might ask: How could (the West) be at war against "the Muslim world" if it's confined to five countries that house only a minority of the world's Muslims? Or: How could it be at war against "the Muslim world" if most of the Muslims even in these five countries are not the enemy? Beats me.

So is Islam in fact destined to clash with the West? Before giving this question any sort of validity, we must first establish the lack of intellectuality and unfairness it holds. First, as Gelvin and many others have established, Islam is not a monolith, thus it is impossible to address such an all-encompassing question. Even more problematic, however, is that Islam has no central authority figure (such as the Pope for Catholicism) who speaks for the entire religion and its followers. Thus, it is even more difficult to find a monolith amongst its 1.7 billion followers.

Lastly, because these 1.7 billion followers are scattered throughout the world, that uniform monolith is even *more* impossible to establish since religious interpretation and practice adapts to the environment in which it is situated (i.e. I, as a Lebanese-American Muslim, view and practice Islam differently than a Muslim from rural Nigeria). In 2014, religious scholar Reza Aslan published an op-ed in *The New York Times* addressing this issue:

Religion is often far more a matter of identity than it is a matter of beliefs and practices... As a form of identity, religion is inextricable from all the other factors that make up a person's self-understanding, like culture, ethnicity, nationality, gender and sexual orientation... No religion exists in a vacuum. On the contrary, every faith is rooted in the soil in which it is planted. It is a fallacy to believe that people of faith derive their values primarily from their Scriptures. The opposite is true. People of faith insert their values into their Scriptures, reading them through the lens of their own cultural, ethnic, nationalistic and even political perspectives. After all, scripture is meaningless without interpretation.

It is this flexibility and adaptability of religion that makes it possible for people of all faiths, including Islam, to live all over the world. It is why 5,200 British citizens are able to convert to Islam each year, and 23% of the Muslim American population are converts (*The Economist*).

One of these American converts is renowned Imam Suhaib Webb, ex-DJ and Oklahoman grandson of a preacher who converted to Islam in college. Today, Webb is one of the leading voices in the U.S. about the compatibility of Islam and the West and the importance of an authentic American Muslim identity (he is on ISIS' hit list as a result). With the rise of converts and second- and third-generation Muslims, there is an increase in the fusion of Islamic and Western values with groups and websites such as Mipsterz (a group of Muslim hipsters) and [muslimgirl.com](http://muslimgirl.com) (a website founded to give Muslim girls a voice, with articles covering everything from beauty and health tips to Qur'an study) — and there are more and more imams,

such as NYC Imam Khalid Latif, stepping up to fill leadership roles in the evolution of a more "hip" and inclusive Islam (Ebrahimji). Acclaimed religious figure Tariq Ramadan does not differ, saying that while "the Islamic horizon has suffered great pain in living its real life, in finding its place and in fulfilling itself in Western categories and modes of being" ("Islam" 203), coexistence is still possible, and Islam remains above all compatible with modernity (which he stresses is different from Westernization). In order to accomplish this successful coexistence and integration, he calls for a reformation not of Islam but of "Muslim intelligence", urging Muslims to study religious references and "distinguish that which, in their religion, is unalterable from that which is subject to change and to determine... the assets and flaws of their presence in the Occident" ("Être occidental").

*"The gap is not between Islam and the West, but between more religious and less religious people."*

In an article published in the *Boston Review* in 2010, John Bowen argued that "the gap is not between Islam and the West, but between more religious and less religious people." In terms of a conflict of values, for instance, a 2009 Gallup survey found that 78% of the French general public finds homosexuality morally acceptable, as opposed to 35% of French Muslims. However, a Pew study that same year found that in America, regular church-going correlated with greater disapproval of homosexuality, and 60% of both American Protestants and American Muslims disapproved of homosexuality. If Bowen's hypothesis is true, it makes sense in America and especially France, where religion is becoming increasingly insignificant. A 2015 Pew study

found that compared to 2007, there was a 6% drop in the percentage of American adults who describe themselves as religiously affiliated and a 7% increase in adults who are religiously unaffiliated. Overall, there was a 3% decrease in adults who believe in God. In a 2008 study, Pew cited that the majority of the French population says religion is not important in their lives. On the other end, Muslims are becoming more prominent. A 2015 Pew study found that Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world, expected to increase by 73% by 2050 — as opposed to Christianity's predicted 35% increase. At this rate, the number of Muslims will nearly equal the number of Christians in the world, and Muslims will make up 10% of Europe's population. On the other hand, the atheist and agnostic populations are projected to decline worldwide, but increase in France from 28% to over 44%. Unsurprisingly, the paralyzing fear that "The Muslims are coming!" and taking over is very present. France, with its universalism and *laïcité*, is by no means an exception.

### **Islam and France**

During the four months I spent in France, and up until this day, I could usually find at least one article published about Islam and Muslims at each news outlet every day. Needless to say, the question of the compatibility of Islam and France was pressing, and with each terrorist attack people were scrambling more and more to find an answer. One of those answers was *Le Conseil Français du Culte Musulman* (The French Council of the Muslim Religion, CFCM). *Culte* is a special word that has no equivalent in English, conveniently spun to cater to *laïcité*. It refers to a religion without the religious aspect (thus, more so "cultural" activities, which remains a problematic concept), giving the government a pass to roll up their sleeves, bypass the 1905 law and get as involved with religion as they wish. The CFCM is a body of 25 elected members

who regulate Muslim religious activities through the State, such as funding mosques, training imams and distributing *halal* meat. However, the organization continuously failed and did not start up again until 2016, thanks to the motivation and urgency created by the political landscape and financial support provided by another new organization, *Le Fondation Pour l'Islam de France* (the Foundation for French Islam, FOIF). Former Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who was chosen to head the FOIF, wrote an op-ed in *Le Monde* in September of 2016 that he titled "Constructing a bridge between Islam and the Republic." In this article, Chevènement stressed the importance of creating a French Islam that is Republican and autonomous through educational, cultural and social projects, which he urges the Muslim community to take responsibility for. Prior to that, former Prime Minister Manuel Valls wrote a similar op-ed in *Le Journal de Dimanche* in July of 2016, claiming that Islam has already found its place in the French Republic, *but* there remains the issue of terrorism, which he says is the responsibility of the Muslim community to combat.

*"When everything is normal, Muslims are expected to stay out of the public sphere and conceal their religion. However, when it comes to terrorism, the laïque country demands Muslims to reveal their identities in order not only to condemn terrorism, but also to prevent it."*

Despite the presumably good intentions behind CFCM, FOIF and the op-eds written by these French politicians, there are major hypocrisies that lie within them. First, there cannot be such a thing as a French Islam. France, as a country, does not own the religion of Islam, nor any



variation of it. Islam is a religion that has followers worldwide, including in France, but it is not French property. Second, for a country and government that has been vehemently arguing that the level of religiosity of Muslims makes Islam fundamentally incompatible with France because of the French Republican value of *laïcité* (as of 2012, 60% of the French population believed that Muslims were too visible, according to the French Institute of Public Opinion), the government's creation and funding of organizations meant to organize and regulate the Muslim community is completely contradictory to the *laïcité* they say they must defend. Finally, the politicians' placement of responsibility on the Muslim community to both organize itself and combat terrorism again contradicts *laïcité*, as it is essentially urging Muslims to be present and vocal in the public sphere. These clear hypocrisies unveil the true motivation behind these political schemes. First, CFCM and FOIF are organizations created not to help the Muslim community, but to surveil it, as made clear by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy's 2003 statement, "How can we expect them to obey the law if we don't invite them to the table?" (Bowen 39). The idea is to pull Islam into the open and be able to contain it, rather than let it be hidden in undiscoverable pockets throughout France. Second, *laïcité* is leveraged as an argument only when convenient for this control of the Muslim community and Islamophobic dialogue. When everything is normal, Muslims are expected to stay out of the public sphere and conceal their religion. However, when it comes to terrorism, the *laïque* country demands Muslims to reveal their identities in order not only to condemn terrorism, but also to prevent it.



Massarah Mikati. "Choose your suburb. Vote (National) Front!" A National Front poster portrays a simplistic binary embodying the common belief that being French and being Muslim are mutually exclusive. 2016. Noisy-le-Sec, Paris.

In September of 2016, the French nonprofit think tank *l'Institut Montaigne* published a study conducted and written by essayist Hakim El Karoui, provocatively titled "A French Islam is possible." The study detailed various aspects of the Muslim population in France, from its demographics, to the population's religiosity and practices (do they buy *halal* meat? How often do they go to the mosque? Do they wear the *hijab*? Essentially, stereotypical images the French have that define Muslims), to the risk of radicalization. Karoui concluded that a "French Islam" does not currently exist, but is possible to obtain upon "creating situations capable of producing and diffusing ideas and French values." One way Karoui proposes this can be achieved is by ending foreign involvement in the French Muslim community (mosques, imams and Muslim organizations are often funded by North African countries) and looking to the French-born and

raised community to step into leadership roles, much like what has been taking place in the U.S. Yet, France had such a figure, and did everything in its power to silence him.

Tariq Ramadan was born and raised in Switzerland to an Egyptian Muslim family. A prominent religious figure, Ramadan was elected as one of the top influential thinkers in the world by *Foreign Policy* magazine and one of the 100 most influential people in the world by *Time*. As previously stated, the academic and writer continuously preaches and argues for progressive and modern outlooks on Islam, and believes in the harmonious coexistence of Islam and the Occident. France, however, has completely demonized and silenced the iconic thinker. Ramadan has repeatedly been barred from holding conferences and having airtime to present his ideas, deemed to have a "double discourse" and agenda to "Islamize Europe" (Saad). Nonetheless, Ramadan has persisted to present his views and argue for the compatibility of Islam and the West:

Occidental politics, media and their citizens are not resting. The responsibilities are shared. Constructing tomorrow's occidental societies with Muslims — because Islam is henceforth an Occidental religion — requires an open vision. There are four requirements of everyone: 1) consider the long historic period, with the evolutions and real renewals of Islamic thinking in the Occident (like in the rest of the world); 2) cease the oversimplification of Islam without taking into account the diversity of its trends; 3) identify that which comes from the religious and Islam and that which is connected to socioeconomic problems... ; 4) refuse the temptation of emotional politics based on fear and rejection, exploited in excess by the extreme right and populists of all kinds ("*Être occidental*").

Ramadan is not the only person who sees the compatibility of Islam and France. For young French Muslims like Nawelle Mohammed and her friend Asma Yassa, the compatibility is nothing short of obvious.

I first met Asma Yassa in a Costa Coffee coffeeshop in the young, touristy and university-dense 5th *arrondissement* of Paris. She had a pale complexion and kind, dark eyes, with a black *hijab* wrapped snug around her head, not a single hair peeping out from underneath. Her brows furrowed in focus as she sipped a latte and studied with earphones in, a notebook and book on the second Islamic caliph Omar Ibn Al Khattab on the table in front of her. I sat next to her and half-heartedly did my work — the other half of my attention was on Yassa, especially once two of her friends dropped by back-to-back to visit her. Both of her friends were clearly of Arab descent, with bronzed skin and dark, voluminous hair. They dolled up their glowing faces with dramatic makeup and donned fashion-forward outfits. Though neither wore the *hijab*, it was evident from their conversations with Yassa that they, too, were Muslim. The girls giggled together and held serious conversations about boys courting them, deciphering messages sent to them over WhatsApp and complaining about how these boys seem to think they only need to be religious to qualify as a solid candidate for a relationship. Eventually, once Yassa was alone again, I turned to her and opened a conversation with her. She enthusiastically talked to me about the ridiculousness of Islamophobia in France and the difficulties of growing up in, and eventually leaving, the poor *banlieues* of Paris. She was able to escape the "wrong path" in her hometown of the 93<sup>rd</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris, unlike many of her childhood peers. Yassa is now a student at the prestigious Sorbonne University of Paris writing about Omar Ibn Al Khattab for her own thesis. We exchanged numbers and agreed to meet again in the same place the following week, which was when she brought along her friend Nawelle Mohammed.

*"In reality, you can be Occidental and Muslim, it works really well.  
I think you can do something great with it."*

Yassa is the daughter of Algerian parents, though her dad was born in France. "My parents identify very much as French, but my dad has a beard and my mom wears the *hijab*, so it's an automatic cliché," she said to me with a delicate giggle. When she was in middle school, Yassa decided she wanted to wear the *hijab* herself, much to the concern of her teachers who thought her parents forced the shy girl into a miserable life she did not want. It was clear to me that Yassa would not be coerced into anything by her parents. She talked to me about her relationship with each of them, and how much she vehemently disagrees with many of her mom's "traditional" and "sexist" beliefs about the place of a woman (in the kitchen) and what determines a woman's success (motherhood). "My dad, on the contrary, will give me more liberty, he trusts me more and thinks I'm doing great things with my life," she said, beaming. Mohammed is the opposite of Yassa in the sense that she gets along more with her mom than her dad, but parallel in the reasons why. Mohammed's dad is a Moroccan immigrant, and her mom is a white French Muslim convert; she resents her dad for his ultra-traditional and conservative ideas. Mohammed also wears the *hijab*, but unlike Yassa, she wraps it around her head like a turban, baring her neck, some of her dark brown hair and large, gold hoop earrings. She has olive-colored skin and big, green eyes. The best friends picked off each other's plates while talking to me about being Muslim in France and their outlooks on their religion.

According to Yassa, "something big" is happening in their generation, which she says integrates more easily into French society. "In reality, you can be Occidental and Muslim, it works really well," she told me. "I think you can do something great with it." Mohammed told me the main reason for the perceived conflict of ideas is what Martigny previously labeled as equaling identity with culture. "Very often, when people talk about French values they mix it with their idea of French culture that can't change, eating pork with a glass of wine," she said. "If you don't do this, you're not French." It is true that quite often one of the first questions out of French peoples' mouths when they discover someone is Muslim is whether they drink (along with if they fast during the holy month of Ramadan and whether they eat *halal* meat). As far as meat goes, the fact that one of the major questions documented by the study published by *L'Institut Montaigne* was whether self-acclaimed Muslims ate *halal* meat speaks for itself. Thus, Mohammed understands the perception of this inherent conflict, and said it is not only held by non-Muslims but also Muslims themselves.

There's a rejection from both sides because, whether it's Muslims or French, they have the idea that Islam isn't compatible with the Occidental lifestyle. For example, me, growing up, I started seeing that in France it's easy to have vices like going drinking and stuff, so maybe they experience this a little and see that it's really easy to succumb to this in France, and so they think, "The entire Occident doesn't go with my values and I'm going to stay in my house." And on the other side, you have French people that say, "Exactly! Your religion is not compatible with us at all."

But the real conflict, the girls said, is not between Islam and France, but rather between Arab tradition and France, and Islam and the Middle East.

Yassa: I think the problem in France isn't between Islam and France, the real problem is old Arab tradition that is imposed on an evolved Occident. Because in reality, there's a big crisis in the Arab world right now over

Islam and being Arab. They themselves see there's something that isn't working.

Mohammed: Yes, because in the Middle East they see the openness of the Occident and that makes you question your own culture.

Yassa: In the Middle East the culture brings things that don't work with the concept of Islam.

Mohammed: Everyone thinks that they're very believing and practicing and looking for religion but in reality there are people who are looking more for culture than religion.

Yassa: They give a lecture about Islam in the prism of their culture that is not (accurate). I think this problem here is more with tradition. Because me, I'll be honest, when I go to Algeria I don't see people that really exhibit the Muslim faith. When I see them I see tradition.

The examples of this tradition they gave me included sexism, the lack of human rights and nonexistent prioritization of education.

Too often, because of lack awareness and understanding, Islam is not extrapolated from its stereotypical association with Middle Eastern and Arab cultures. Mohammed, who does not at all consider herself to be Arab, is a walking example of the fact that the two identities are independent of, and separate from, one another. "Arabs tell me, 'It's really interesting how you see Islam because there's no connection with the Arab culture,'" she said to me. "And so it's much more reflective and it really gives us a richness because it's a choice." In this conversation, Yassa and Mohammed embody exactly what religious scholar Reza Aslan was trying to get across with his 2014 op-ed in *The New York Times*: religion is moldable based on the environment in which it exists. It is why it is possible for an American from Charlotte, NC and an Indian to both be Christian, but have completely different views and practices of it. It is why a Syrian-American from Detroit, MI and a Malaysian can both be Muslim, yet have completely different views and practices of it. So, if Islam is as compatible with France (and incompatible with the Middle East) as they say, what is the actual conflict happening?

Mahmoud Bourassi has done several interviews with journalists thanks to his career and active community involvement. Plenty of times in these interviews, he has been asked, "What are you first, French or Muslim?" When I first heard he was asked this question, I couldn't hold back my laughter in astonishment. How could they rationally and seriously place these two aspects of one's identity that have nothing to do with each other side-by-side and say, "Pick". I saw it as comparing the incomparable. Vincent Martigny attributed this dialogue to the fear of losing nationalism and its binding grip on societies, particularly with the rise of today's globalization. "That's the problem of public authorities that want to create the idea that it's legitimate to have only one identity and that you should have one identity," he said to me. "That's explainable by the dynamics of nationalism." I realized, though, that the two identities between which the French state wants its Muslim citizens to pick (preferably French) may not be as incomparable as I initially believed.

*"France may just not be willing to share its Muslim, and specifically Maghribi, populations with an identity that could garner more loyalty."*

The French sociologist and philosopher Emile Durkheim is well-known for his work on religion, defining it as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things... beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." Thus, if a religion is something that fosters unity, solidarity and community through shared beliefs and values, nationalism—and especially French nationalism, at that—is a



religion in and of itself. France, in this sense, would be the Church. In 1846, Jules Michelet wrote, "The day when she remembers that she was and that she must be humanity's salvation, France will surround itself with her children and will teach them France as faith and religion," (France and the New Imperialism, Bruno Charbonneau, 21). If this is the case, the journalist's and France's question of whether Bourassi is French or Muslim first may not be so ridiculous after all. Perhaps, the real conflict is a conflict between two religions for loyalty: that of Islam, and that of French nationalism. If France is as insecure as my interviewees depicted, it may just not be willing to share its Muslim, and specifically Maghribi, populations with an identity that could garner more loyalty.

### **Defining France and Frenchness**

The November 13, 2015 Paris terrorist attacks were a major event in recent history that brought questioning and skepticism of the Muslim and Maghribi populations' allegiance into the forefront of the collectively paranoid French mind, voiced bluntly and unapologetically in public discourse. I asked my interviewees the same question, about their identities, their loyalties and affiliations, and their perception of France. For some, like Bondy youth worker Fouad Ben Ahmed, the answer is obvious: his loyalty and identity lies with France and only France. "What do they do, those who are like me, for example, who don't speak Arabic and are simply French?" he asked me. The son of Moroccan and Tunisian parents, Ahmed has a strong disconnect with his parents' culture and religion — he doesn't speak Arabic and not only does not practice Islam, but is very unfamiliar with the religion in general. And after having multiple conversations with him over the period of the four months I was in France, he told me fusing his cultures had never been something that crossed his mind. "You taught me that you can have two cultures and that it's

enriching to have two cultures, that you must aspire for it," he said to me. For others, though, such as Bourassi, having two cultures and hyphenated identities are commonplace, possible and not difficult to attain. It is choosing between the two that is the real challenge, which Bourassi likened to choosing between your mother and father.

I have no problem asserting myself as French because, for me, I do not oppose my French identity with a religious or cultural identity. Rather, I try to build them in harmony, which strengthens me. I know how difficult it is for some politicians to think of us as French as a whole. But, for me, religion is not an obstacle to the ascent of citizenship, but is rather something that arises, something of philosophical order. I understand Islam as a flexible, fluid religion. Islam is a universal religion that applies, adapts itself to all places at all times. It allows everyone to feel fully Muslim and fully French, because it does not confuse culture and religion.

And while there are indeed quite a few people I interviewed who associated being French, or "pure French", with being white, what struck me was the uniformity I found in response to my question of what it means to be French — even by those who seemed not to have attempted to define it before.

*"For me, being French is the history of France, the Republic, democracy, liberty, equality, human rights. It's being able to be in a free country. This is the France I love. I am French. I have French nationality, I was born in France and I think I defend Republican values much more than people who have ancestors in France."*

*- Fouad Ben Ahmed*

*"To be French is to share a culture, to be in harmony with your environment. It is also to share the history of principles and values, to commit oneself for the good of his/her country. It is to participate in its development, its prosperity. To be French is also to make France reconcile with the principles and values it defends, and to reconnect with the history of two populations that have a different history."*

- Mahmoud Bourassi

*"Following the laws of the Republic, at least for me, is what constitutes the actual French identity, more than being white or Christian. The principles of liberty, the Republican device, equality, the Constitution."*

- Alex Roger

*"I believe that if I'm French, according to the Republic, the moment I want to defend liberty, equality and fraternity, to me that is being French. So it's a philosophical definition. This is how I feel French."*

- Magyd Cherfi

Upholding and defending Republican values. Christian, Muslim, atheist, white, Maghribi — the response was the same. Being French is to defend what the Republic stands for, and being loyal to the Muslim religion or Maghribi cultural roots does not result in the shirking of this responsibility. Now, France must decide if it will settle for letting the eternal white, Catholic and Gallic identity become mortal, and become itself one, *multicultural* and indivisible.



Massarah Mikati. "The noise and stench and a few stars." This graffiti is a play off of Jacques Chirac's famous description of the immigrant population in a speech gave in 1991. 2016. Toulouse.

### A New France on the Horizon

Three months after we first met in Toulouse, I got to get together with Tayeb Cherfi one more time on my turf — Paris. We met at a Starbucks in the Odéon area of the 5th *arrondissement*, and as we walked in Cherfi revealed to me that he had never before gone to Starbucks. "Wow! Well... Welcome to America," I told him. He grabbed a slice of cheesecake and a cup of tea, and then we headed upstairs to talk about his France:

For me, being French is being cultured, it's knowledge. I have multiple Frances, I have a France that I like and one that I don't. But the one that I like is that — it's the France of revolutionary ideas, of transformation. I'm a French nationalist, so for me being French is the State. If there's a revolution, it's French. We kill the monarchy to create the Republic. This is the France I like.

When I asked him if he liked the Republic that was created, he let out a giggle:

No. I like the Republic at the instance we took the power (from the monarchy). I like the Republic in the sense of the fundamentals it proposes as perspective. I don't like it in its practice; its dominating, colonizing system. And this is why I don't like it, because it's a model that makes promises that it doesn't keep.

"It's hard to love a country for its culture and education when it uses this culture and education to justify and legitimize its dominating, colonizing system," I responded to Tayeb. "Yes, exactly," he said.

I ended the last chapter with quotes from various interviewees about how they define being French. Each time, they defined it as supporting, defending and believing in the values of the Republic; this Republic that Magyd Cherfi croons to in "Carnage"; the Republic that Tayeb Cherfi wishes could be as utopian in reality as he romanticizes in his mind; the Republic that many romanticize in reality, blindly following it while excusing its ugliness. In their unwavering

support of the Republic, these subjects underline three important claims. First, that it is possible to be Muslim and/or Maghribi and be loyal to the Republic of France. Second, that French institutions are succeeding in creating citizens of the Republic who are loyal to it. Third, and perhaps most importantly, this loyalty highlights the hypocrisies in the ways in which the French Republic functions — they love these values and ideas so much, but, as Magyd says, their application does not "extend beyond white people."

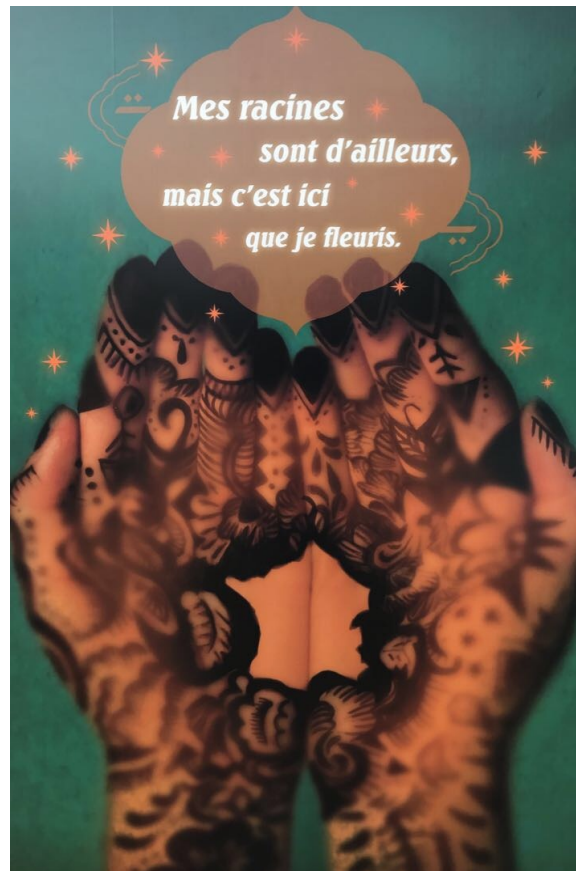
*"It's hard to love a country for its culture and education when it uses this culture and education to justify and legitimize its dominating, colonizing system."*

This thesis has explored how the November 13, 2015 Paris terrorist attacks prompted a critical evaluation of the French Republic and the hypocritical nature of its shortcomings. In the first chapter, through dissecting and analyzing Magyd Cherfi's work, I showed the image of French identity that is proudly touted, yet its exclusive, racist and confining nature in reality. I also showed what comes of Maghribis, like Cherfi, who attempt to conform to this white culture and identity: never fully accepted by the white community, and simultaneously seen as a traitor by the Maghribi one. In the second chapter, I looked at the increased verbal and physical aggression and discrimination against the Muslim community after the attacks, and pointed out the subsequent creation of the perfect breeding grounds for radicalization and terrorism. Yet, at the same time, the increased stigmatization has allowed for a more urgent discussion about French identity and belonging, giving the Maghribi community a chance to take back the mic and mark their place in France. Lastly, in the third chapter, I addressed the most pressing and

compelling question being asked in France today: Is Islam compatible with the French Republic? The short answer is yes. My interviewees discussed above showed the capability of fiercely loving and being loyal to the Republic while also being Maghribi and/or Muslim. Perhaps more notably and crucially, however, youngsters like Nawelle and Asma prove the possibility of the perfect harmony between Islam and the Republic, while foreshadowing how their generation is successfully paving the way to a new French identity.

Thus, through my research I am able to draw two main conclusions about French society based on the witnessed impacts of the terrorist attacks. First, the universalism that is revered in the French Republican model and frequently used as a rallying cry by the French government does not result in equality. In fact, it could even result in terrorism, as it marginalizes its ethnic (particularly Maghribi) citizens and compels them to convert to whiteness, or risk not being "pure French" citizens. Second, an identity crisis is taking place in white France — not the French-Maghribi community. For centuries, France has been desperately holding on to its eternal white, Catholic image out of fear of the unraveling of its nation. The attacks, however, highlighted the necessary mortality of this image. Rather than having the Maghribi community (and other ethnic communities) "integrate" and "assimilate" into France, it is now time for white France to realize this population already makes up essential stitches of the fabric of French society, and to integrate *itself* with its fellow Frenchmen and women. Imprinted on the Great Seal of France is the phrase, "French Republic, democratic, one and indivisible." In order to achieve true oneness and indivisibility in its multicultural society, however, France must first acknowledge the failure of the social contract it implements with a neutrality defined as whiteness. Instead, France must implement pluralism as a means of expression, identity and

function, for pluralism is the model that acknowledges the value of each of a nation's constituents, thereby leading to a more cohesive society. While pluralism may not always bring about perfect results in every country, it at least gives all of its citizens the same right to claim its "stitch" in the societal fabric, and the acceptance of each stitch's importance and legitimacy thereof.



Massarah Mikati. "My roots are from elsewhere, but I flourish here." Graphic designed by Ali Guessom of the association *Remem'beur*. 2016. *Origines Contrôlées*. Toulouse.

In 2012, Danielle Marx-Scouras, a scholar of Francophone studies at The Ohio State University, traveled to Toulouse with her students, where she introduced them to the Zebda band members. Once the students shuffled into the room, Mustapha Amokrane stepped up in front of

them. "I am French," he said. "But my name is Mustapha Amokrane." The class let out a collective chuckle as he smiled slyly.

In 2001, Mustapha's brother, Salah, was running in the municipal elections in Toulouse, France. Throughout the course of his campaign, he was invited to be interviewed on a national French talk show. Amokrane walked on stage, sat down, grabbed the mic, and with an air of calm confidence said, "My name is Salah Amokrane, and I am French."

Notice the difference in the sentence structures of these two brothers. One is French, *but* his name is Mustapha. The other's name is Salah, *and* he is French. For one, his ethnic origins get in the way of the French image he displays. For the other, his ethnic origins will not stop him from declaring his ownership of his French identity. If there is anything that captures the dichotomy and hypocrisy of being French, and the conflict of being French of Maghribi descent, it is these two statements.



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